

THEY TOLD ME SO

BY J. H. TALEYARKHAN

With a foreword by

HON'BLE DR. M. R. JAYAKAR

Cartoons

THACKER & CO., LTD.,
BOMBAY

FIRST PUBLISHED 1947

Copyright Reserved

*Published by C. Murphy, for
Thacker & Co., Ltd., Rampart Row, Bombay,
and printed by R. Bourdon,
at Western Printers & Publishers' Press.
15 & 23, Hamam Street, Fort, Bombay.*

CONTENTS.

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| Foreword by The Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar, P.C. | ix |
| Preface | xi |
| I A Meeting with Mahatma Gandhi | 1 |
| II A Glimpse of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru . | 4 |
| III C. Rajagopalachari deplores measures of desperation in 1942 | 7 |
| IV The Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar on the prospects of Sapru Committee | 12 |
| V Sir Chunilal Mehta tells India how to get on with America | 17 |
| VI Mr. Justice M. C. Chagla passes judgment on Bombay University Scandals | 23 |
| VII Sir Chimanlal Setalvad condemns South Africa's Fascists and our Delhi Duds . | 29 |
| VIII Sir Homi Mody, Lady Rama Rau, Commis- sioner Mirchandani and Mayor Nagindas Master protest against the terrors of the reign of requisitioning | 34 |
| IX K. M. Munshi defends the Freedom of the Press | 40 |
| X A. D. Shroff gives honours certificate to Sir Jeremy Raisman | 46 |
| XI Minoo Masani condemns San Francisco Conference | 51 |
| XII Dr. Jayakar clarifies Sapru Proposals . | 56 |
| XIII Views on Victory — Bhulabhai Desai, Sir Cowasji Jehangir, Sir Chunilal Mehta, N. M. Joshi | 63 |
| XIV Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's Post-War Plan for the Women of India | 69 |
| XV With S. K. Patil in Congress House . . | 74 |
| XVI Rajaji's Faith in Britain's Labour Govern- ment | 78 |

| Chapter | Page |
|--|------|
| XVII Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukerjee belabours the British and does not spare the Congress . | 82 |
| XVIII Wavell proposes, Dr. Jayakar disposes! . | 90 |
| XIX Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel deplores Simla Conference | 94 |
| XX Acharya J. B. Kripalani exposes the Black Market and the Blackballing of India's freedom | 100 |
| XXI Sarat Chandra Bose, the man and his views | 108 |
| XXII Sarat Bose condemns Imperialism, Wavellism and Chiang Kai-shek | 112 |
| XXIII M. Y. Nurie wonders—Whither Jinnah? | 119 |
| XXIV Bhulabhai Desai extols Azad Hind havoc | 124 |
| XXV The axe on the neck of the black marketeers—Mr. A. D. Shroff commends D. O. . | 130 |
| XXVI Sir Purshottamdas Thakordas between two worlds of D. O.: Principle—and—Purpose | 134 |
| XXVII The Brain behind Literacy in the Service of the Masses—Mr. B. G. Kher | 138 |
| XXVIII Sardar Patel tells how Bombay was saved from unprecedented catastrophe . . . | 143 |
| XXIX Sorabjee Rustomjee describes the South African "Inquisition" against Indians and demands Economic Sanctions | 148 |
| XXX Epidemic of strikes in Bombay: S. K. Patil explains there is no economic sanction behind sweepers' strike | 154 |
| XXXI Jai Prakash Narain spits fire at the Cabinet Mission | 159 |
| XXXII Sardar Sardul Singh warns against communal poison | 166 |
| XXXIII Dr. Syed Hussain mixes praise with blame for Americans and Indians—but makes no mistake about the British | 172 |
| XXXIV Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya sees no future in sham of Constituent Assembly . . . | 178 |

| Chapter | | Page |
|---------|--|------|
| XXXV | Masani Sees Gloomy Food Future For India | 184 |
| XXXVI | Chundrigar Wants Equality With Congress As Basis Of Co-operation | 189 |
| XXXVII | K. M. Munshi on Constituent Assembly: Story of two capricious girls and an unreliable husband | 195 |
| XXXVIII | People will rule but Princes will stay: Shankerrao Deo's solution for States' problem | 199 |
| XXXIX | Between the Inevitable and the Indomitable: A.I.C.C. Resolution <i>vs.</i> the "Resolution" of Gopinath Bardoloi | 203 |

IMPRESSIONS AND "NON-INDIGENOUS" INTERVIEWS

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| XL | Dr. B. R. Ambedkar — An Impression | 209 |
| XLI | Beverley Nichols — A Deception | 211 |
| XLII | Edgar Snow's Fears and Faith for India | 213 |
| XLIII | Howard Donovan pays last tribute to Franklin Delano Roosevelt | 215 |
| XLIV | A Talk with H.R.H. Crown Prince of Arabia | 219 |



FOREWORD

by

THE RT. HON'BLE DR. M. R. JAYAKAR, P.C.

THESE interviews which were found interesting when they first appeared, promise to prove of lasting merit, as they furnish a fascinating panorama of the views of Indian leaders responding to historic events as they took their breathless course in this country.

Mr. Taleyarkhan has a gift of writing them up. What is more—he has the singular dexterity of wringing interviews out of persons initially unwilling to be drawn out, but thawing, later, at his warm touch, forsaking their wonted frigidity.

They feel that there is no fear of misrepresentation in Mr. Taleyarkhan's hands. His portraitures are accurate and faithful in form and lineament. They are never dull nor livid. His personal touch invests them with life and colour and his well selected diction makes them attractive, even more than the drab personalities behind them ever succeeded in appearing in their eventful careers.

His pen pictures have another supreme merit. They are instructive and edifying, as they illustrate the opinions of those who have helped, in their time, to mould the country's future. His heroes are leading representatives of all important parties in the country. He distributes his attention impartially on all, including non-party men like me who have not much to recommend them except their singular isolation. He permits every one a free airing of his convictions. Even foreign observers have found a place in his symposium.

The book is unique of its kind, for, to the best of my recollection, there has rarely appeared in India such a fully representative ensemble of interviews and impressions. The author is equally true to himself and makes no effort to disguise his own inclinations, where he does not agree. His differences of views, however, evince a charming modesty. They are not

obtrusive and, though voiced with courage and candour, they leave no sting behind.

It is difficult to select one chapter over another as a specimen of the merits of the book which are evenly scattered over all the parts. I feel sure that the leading men, whom he has immortalized by his pen, would derive great pleasure on perusing his revealing analysis of their views with impartial perspicacity.

The book should serve a useful purpose in these days, when not a few public men delight in throwing round themselves a halo of mystic perplexity. They can never be caught unawares in *déshabillé*. It is the privilege of a fascinating interviewer to do this and to present, to an admiring world, a permanent imprint of their true inside. We always feel grateful for such services and if this book served that purpose, the author should regard his labours as fully rewarded.

Ashram,
Winter Road,
Malabar Hill,
Bombay.

6th January, 1947.

M. R. JAYAKAR.

THE AUTHOR'S THANKS

They say in cricket that to win the toss is half the battle won. So with books—to win a Foreword like this, is half the recommendation! My grateful thanks to the Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar.

H. J. H. T.

Wx

H7

2493

PREFACE

THEY told me so. . . . Gandhiji and Rajaji, Vallabhbhai and Bhulabhai, Jayakar and Setalvad, Sarat Chandra and Jai Prakash and a host of others.

I have met all of them more than once and discussed with them their social, economic and political creeds—without distinction of caste or creed.

As I reflect on what they told me, which I published in various papers, mostly the *Blitz*, I see how the career of events has followed the line of their thoughts.

Master makers of modern India as many of the distinguished guests I have the privilege to include within the parlour of the pages to follow, are or have been, their words and deeds will live like landmarks, immortal and perennial, in the new map of a new India. On the threshold of being a free country, always a proud country with a great heritage of courage and culture, India has produced many great sons of whom the leaders I have met are some of the finest examples.

Today they are engaged, to put it in the poignant phrase of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in "the freedom to be free" which, let us hope with Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, will be governed by the "invincibility of gentleness" and that every framer of India's future will regard it as his duty to see that the generalship of this gentleness is not abused, that indeed it is enforced so that from her painful and protracted struggle both within and without, India may emerge not only free but united in her freedom.

My talks with the leaders—they cannot strictly be called interviews because I have done far more talking in them than merely asking questions—are arranged in the chronological order of my meetings, so that they become a historical review of responsible opinion from time to time on important matters of the moment; some of which even if they may have lost their topicality, will not lose their bearing on India's history.

In addition, this system has saved me the headache, which may have developed into a nervous breakdown, of deciding on

priorities and prides of place. The only glaring omission in my list is Mr. Jinnah, but if this book ever has another edition, I am confident of counting him in it . . . and then I will be able to say—"I told you so!"

I have always found it a fascinating experience to meet and know these large-scale public figures. The experience is not enveloped in the fact that you want to be photographed with them and preserve it in your souvenir album with the express purpose of impressing your future generation with the company its grandpa kept, but because you get a chance of knowing their views at first-hand, of studying their temperament, their mental make-up, their attitude towards the common man and possibly locate those ingredients in their character which have led him, the common man, to accept their opinion as better than his own and to allow himself to be influenced by it. And indeed at times by the power of their sheer personality convert a fierce prejudice into an irresistible adoration.

If I may permit myself to digress from a personality I was not born to meet, I would conclude by mentioning one small instance in the life of Napoleon to illustrate my point.

When in exile at St. Helena, he was visited by Admiral Eden who had never met him before. This is how the Admiral subsequently described his reaction to a friend :

"I waited for Napoleon in an outer room and you must imagine how eagerly I expected his entrance. The door was thrown open at last and in he came. He was short and fat and nothing very attractive but for his eye ! My word, sir, I had never seen anything like it. . . . He turned to me and I understood for the first time the meaning of the phrase 'a born ruler of men'. I had been taught to hate the French as I hated the devil ; but when Napoleon looked at me there was such power and majesty in his look that if he had bade me lie down that he might walk over me, I would have done it at once, Englishman although I was. The look on Napoleon's face was the revelation of the man and the explanation of his power. He was born to command."

*Ahmed Manzil,
Warden Road,
Bombay,
February 1947.*

HOMI J. H. TALEYARKHAN.

CHAPTER I

A MEETING WITH MAHATMA GANDHI *

IN the preface I have given the reaction of Admiral Eden on first seeing Napoleon Bonaparte. It was also my reaction when I first met Mahatma Gandhi. For my uppermost memory is naturally of my meeting with another one of those men 'born to command' (of course in a different way to Napoleon Bonaparte!)

I had never met the Mahatma before. I had never talked to him. I had never seen him. I had never admired him. So, I was naturally anxious to know what impression he could make on the prejudice I had been taught to bear him.

I spent over two days in Sevagram, as his guest. This tiny outpost of Wardha has acquired almost a legendary fame and a spiritual significance by its association with the Mahatma. The host of Sevagram would enquire after his guest in person, how he had slept, how he had eaten, if he were comfortable in every way—according to the standards of Sevagram of course!

People say there is something in his eyes which hypnotises you, there is something in his attire—or what there is of it—which attracts you. There is nothing in either. Unlike Napoleon, in my opinion, he has nothing in his eye which would bade me lie down so he could walk over me.

It is when he starts talking that you start gaping, gasping. To mimic our English admiral—my word, sir, I had never heard anything like it. He uses the simplest words and imparts to them the most complicated meanings. You are invariably left guessing. For what he said, could have meant *this*, *that* or the *other*. As a result you can never really accuse Gandhiji of inconsistency. If you take it in one sense when he meant it in another, it is not his fault. But the effort to baffle, I am con-

* Extracts in this chapter have been taken from my book *I Have It From Gandhiji*.



vinced, is not deliberate. It comes naturally to him because of his spiritual make up.

He does not make you feel ill at ease at all. When I saw him, my feeling was, here is another villager of India in cleaner garments than the average villager is accustomed to wear—except that the villager usually has a shirt on his back. Gandhiji hasn't.

He creates the exact impression of the class he represents. It is only when his mind and tongue go into action that he leaves the villager in him far behind. It is only then you realise that you are in the presence of a much greater being. You automatically forget all the differences you may have had with him. You forget all the wrongs you feel he has done you. You forget all the blunders which your uncomprehending mind feels he has committed. You remember just one thing—that the Simple has become the Sublime.

It was on the evening of my arrival in Sevagram that I was introduced to the Mahatma when he was on his twice a day walk. Leaning lightly on the shoulders of two young maidens, he was walking with the brisk step of a man who far from having arisen from his death-bed, as he had at that time, looked as if all he had risen from was—a good afternoon's nap, so fresh he seemed in body and mind.

With the wrinkles of five and seventy years, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is still a young man. He has suffered and yet suffering has made no impression on him. He has been humiliated yet humiliation has not broken his spirit. He has been jailed and yet his resistance has not weakened. He has fasted and yet Death has not dared to touch him.

Of his latest fast, I heard him say, "I knew I would not die. I felt sorry for Major Candy. He was so worried. He was sure I would die. I, the patient, comforted the doctor by assuring him I would not die. I lived up to my assurance. It was a resistance fast and I resisted death."

Another interesting story about his fast was told me by Col. Beza Shah, one of the doctors attendant on Gandhiji. He said Gandhi was a very "sporting" patient and obliged as far as he could. Once the anxious Major Candy advised him to have a shave so that he would feel better. Gandhiji

agreed to have one rightaway but the next morning after having had it, he told Candy, "I have had the shave as you desired. I don't feel any better. But if it has done you any good, I am glad."

His sense of humour is redoubtable and amazing even in a crisis, whether physical or political. "If I cannot laugh, I cannot survive," he says. Rightly too, I should think. It is after all his sense of humour which sustains him. He can laugh out anything. If he cannot annihilate his opponent by argument, he will vanquish him by good-humoured ridicule.

He loves teasing and takes a child's delight in it. Once I wanted his photograph. Much photographed though he is, Gandhiji will give you everything but if he can help it—which very often he can't, he will not give you his photograph.

Unfortunately when I tried, he could help it! But he did not say so in so many words. He said, no objection. But he kept on walking. I remember the light was weak, so I had to give a slow speed. A momentary stand-still was necessary. I requested Gandhiji to stop for a moment. Stop? he repeated, did I ask him to stop! Now he will run. And he *actually* ran, this sprightly lad of 75!

And what was worse, he thoroughly enjoyed seeing me in difficulties! He did not carry a care in the world at that moment, the man who bears India's destiny on his shoulders.

I concluded that here was at least one head which would not lie uneasy no matter how many crowns it wore!

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE OF PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

SECOND-IN-COMMAND and heir-apparent to the *gadi* of Sevagram is Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. I have heard him a number of times. I have seen him a number of times. I have seen him *mobbed* a number of times. To give one instance of



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

this mobbing, soon after his release from his three and a half year old detention, he came to Bombay. I saw him at Victoria Terminus.

He had stood the journey well, but not the jail. He looked fresh but lean, cheerful but thin. Only his spirit was still stout. His popularity perhaps never greater.

He could not alight at all for at least 20 minutes. The moment the train stopped and his compartment was detected, there was such an uncontrollable onslaught of bouquets and garlands that the Pandit had to seek hurried shelter back in his compartment.

All arrangements went to pieces. Organization and discipline were overwhelmed by the frantic enthusiasm of the crowds which, treating the efforts of the rain to damp their spirits with supreme contempt, packed every inch of the platform. Nothing on earth would have arrested the rough and rude, the roaring attention and affection of the people for their darling. Every variety of slogan rent the air.

He could barely walk a few paces when eventually he was able to leave his compartment. Climbing a table where he was to be garlanded and honoured, he waved to the people, he smiled at them, he shook hands with them, he was pulled down by them, he was pitched up again by them—he was their victim—confusion, bewilderment—a riot of rejoicing at its height.

All semblance of order, every cordon, was broken by the heaving, the surging masses. For sometime, I had my feet inches off the ground as I found myself swayed hither and thither by the rolling waves of humanity. I thought Nehru would have to walk on the heads of people—which he could have done with perfect safety, so tightly packed they were—if ever he hoped to reach his car.

When he did after all, the car could only move at a snail's pace—he had to perch himself up precariously on the roof—everything possible by way of ovation was sent flying at him and whatever he flung back was avidly seized by souvenir hunters—for those garlands and bouquets bore the touch of Nehru's hand.

Such is the inadequate picture I can paint of the feelings

every caste and every creed of the people of Bombay exhibited for the nation's hero.

*

*

*

So much for the "mobbing". Now for the waiting—the number of hours I have waited on him—or more properly—for him.

Once I got an appointment to see him at nine o'clock in the morning at his residence at Carmichael Road. He was talking to someone when I arrived. He bade me sit down in the same hall where he was talking. The talk went on. Nine o'clock resolved itself into ten; ten into eleven. I was still waiting.

Eventually my patience ran out. I got up and interrupted, "Well, Panditji . . ."

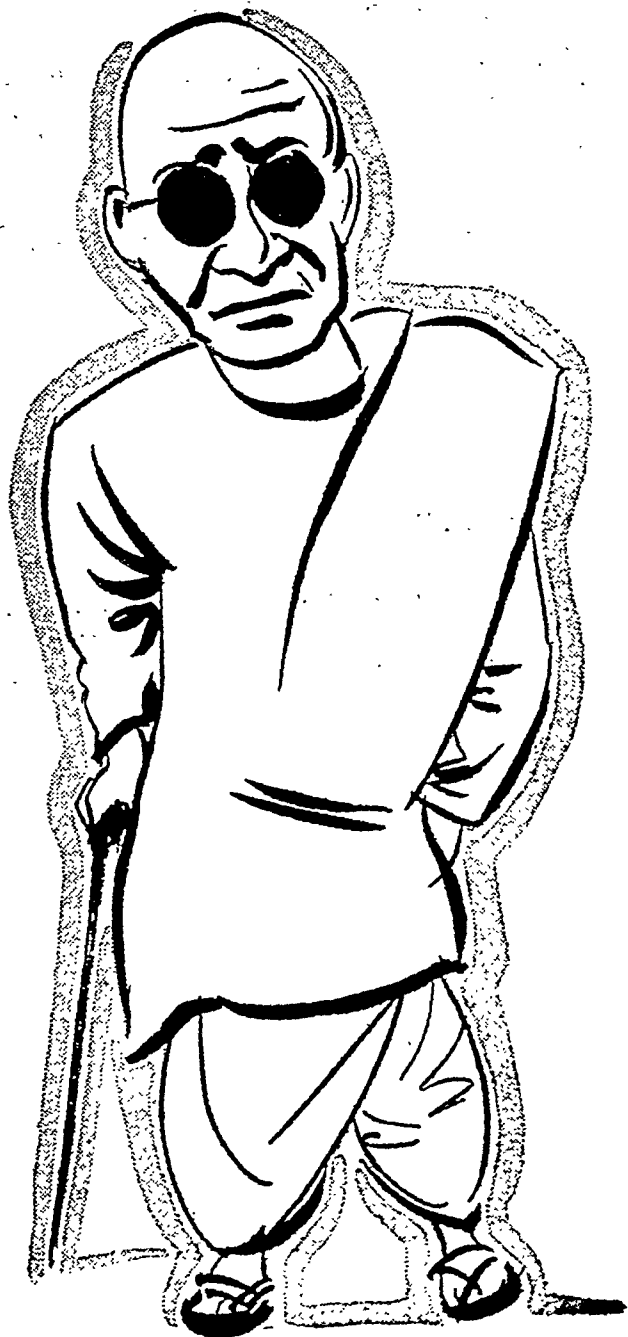
But before I could say anything further Jawaharlal broke in—"Oh, are you going? I am so glad . . . er . . . you came. Good-bye."

"Good-bye . . ." I stammered, bewildered. And left.

CHAPTER III

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI DEPLORES MEASURES OF DESPERATION IN 1942

I WILL always cherish the memory of my several meetings with the Mahatma of Madras—C. Rajagopalachari. And especially the first one. It was in 1942, soon after the August Resolution and the outbreak of disturbances. It was without appointment I had gone to see him. And at a time—it was at eight in the morning—hardly meant for a visit. I was ready to be turned out with an admonition or two on my manners. I would have deserved it.



Dr. B. R. Ambedkar — Peace — and Appease

Great leaders usually specialize in this sort of thing. But Rajaji, like Sastri is different. Far from being unapproachable, he is irreproachable. I caught him relaxing at full length on his couch in Birla House where he was putting up. He put me at ease at once with his smile and his hand of welcome. In that first minute I realized that his greatness lay in his simplicity.

For a few minutes, he studied me through his huge big dark glasses. Then he began to talk. He is as good a conversationalist as he is a speaker. Perhaps even better. Because in conversation, one requires the additional quality of patience and tolerance with people who in their little knowledge are difficult to convince. He tries to convince you in a variety of ways, by the employment of similes, metaphors, everything and he crowns it all, by asking you in all earnestness what you think of the matter—as if the issue depended on *your* decision.

Rajaji believes he wears a frown and looks austere whereas the impression he creates is one of charming affability. He is so precise and so punctilious that he is never satisfied with the answer he gives till he has thoroughly exhausted all its possibilities. If he has the time, he will devote hours to anyone, clearing his difficulties and solving his problems.

We naturally talked of the Indian situation, the Indian mess, call it what you like, this wave of unruliness which is sweeping over the cities of India today. Rajagopalachari, who resigned from the Congress, from power, for the sake of his convictions, does not favour this attempt at gaining independence. Not that he does not want independence. He is a thorough nationalist and a staunch suitor of liberty.

But there are other ways, he believes, of getting about ridding the country of foreign rule. It is useless to suggest them at the moment or try to dissuade the people from their set purpose of burning down the house they themselves built. It will only infuriate them to further misdeeds.

I wondered how long this state of affairs would go on. With the smile he never once took off his face in all the time we talked, he explained that these people have got into their heads that the habit of taking things to pieces, is the best way of driving the British away and of gaining their ends. It is a habit formed of desperation and nothing on earth at the moment will relieve

them of it.

The best thing is to let them be, let them go about their business of wrecking, till they realize of their own accord the utter futility of their methods. It is a method born of desperation, a method of madness which only does harm to their own country. But they will never believe it. So it is useless trying to speak to them.

They believe they have tried every way of shaking off the shackles. They have failed. So they have taken to this deplorable measure by which they hope to make the British administration impossible in the country. They hope that these small scale acts of terrorism will terrify old man Churchill and his comrade Amery and they will put their tails between their legs—and run!

Or perhaps they believe that by destroying themselves, they might be able to destroy the British too. So fanatic seems to be their state of mind. In this connection, the acute mind of "C.R." thought of a striking simile. "It is just like you coming to grips with a tiger. You know very well you don't stand the least chance, but you hope that during the fight you might drag him into a fire. It will destroy you, but it will also destroy him. That is all you want. Perhaps you might even escape, who knows. Scorched but alive and above all FREE."

In order to be free these people seem to be ready for even a jungle life. They will destroy everything and go and live in the jungle. It is not a comfortable way of living, but they are happy because it will be a *free* way of living. They are prepared to sacrifice the comforts and civilization of today for the sake of freedom. Rather jungle life, primitive life, provided it is free to 20th century civilization under restrictions. That seems to be their attitude.

It is a strange attitude, thinks Rajagopalachari, for in their hatred of the British, they enormously magnify their worth. On the one hand, they ridicule the British for having achieved nothing in this war except a remarkable series of blunders, that they are much too weak to overwhelm Germany or Japan; on the other hand, they fear their strength so much that they think the British will never leave India. Of course, we shall be able to make them leave India, but alas, not by recourse to such

madness.

"And that at a time when we are on the threshold of an invasion by another foreign power." I ventured to comment.

"They don't care," said Rajaji, "their hopelessness and desperation are such that they feel no difference between one foreign rule and another. Since it is impossible to get rid of it, they say, we might have this or that. Anyway, we are fed up with the British, let's try Japs! Why should we fight them? That's the line of these poor people's thinking." And in the smile of the great man who was talking to me, I could see a line or two of despair, of disillusionment.

Mr. Rajagopalachari admitted that suffering there must be before any new order can be found. Pain must be endured in order to find peace. There has to be plenty of destruction before an aim can be achieved. Only that Rajaji saw no point in the present form of it. It was going to lead nowhere.

He does not think that this was the doing only of hooligans. He feels that hooliganism pure and simple cannot last so long and so systematically unless it had some backing.

Mr. Gandhi himself knows of it but he is not interested in having it stopped. He appears to be fed up because the British have taken too great an advantage of his theory of non-violence. He tried his best to obtain results with that inoffensive weapon and failed. So now he does not care what happens.

"Does not care what happens to his people?" I wondered. "Surely he does not want his own people to suffer by the destruction of their own property?"

The smiling politician who seems to have the extraordinary faculty of becoming a sponge and absorbing every drop of possibility—and sometimes invisible rays of speculation—explained that perhaps Gandhiji thought the British were suffering more.

As for the people, the people who are in favour of this are happy. We who are against it are unhappy. We do not count except in this, perhaps, that the greater our discomfiture, the more their rejoicing, because we do not see reason in their ways and means of protest.

We had been talking almost an hour. Rajagopalachari, the national politician, rose—a sign for me to leave. My fascinating experience was at an end. *His simplicity and sincerity had been*

such I thought that at least here was a politician who does not create his little laws and sit attentive to his own applause.

18th October 1942.

CHAPTER IV

THE RT. HON'BLE DR. M. R. JAYAKAR ON THE PROSPECTS OF SAPRU COMMITTEE

SIMILAR to Rajaji in the spirit of conciliation is the Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar for whom, after nursing a dislike for sometime, I have come to cherish the highest regard and esteem. For two years before I met him, I laboured under the delusion that this famous intermediary, this friend of prime ministers and viceroys, of politicians and patriots, was arrogant and unapproachable. I never ventured to get anywhere near him to protect my own pride.

It was only by chance that I came to know and to be convinced that Jayakar was not only the friend of Reading, Irwin or Linlithgow, nor even merely of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. He was also my friend, the friend of the common people. In spite of my own armour of conceit, I never felt so ashamed and humbled as when I did at the time I discovered how I had misjudged him.

It is impossible to go into all he told me, a dramatized story of an epic career. It began in the time of the Great Gokhale way back in 1915 and reached a marathon whirlwind of activity for the next quarter of a century. The whirlwind has abated today but the spirit of the man though repeatedly battered by the uncompromising hand of Fate is still unbowed, still challenging the enemies of India to do their worst.

He told me, our fight today is not so much with foreigners, not with the British, as it is with our own people. He deplored the rampant spirit of communalism in our midst, among our



masses, in the hearts of our leaders. Everybody thinks in terms of himself, of his own community, of his own interests, however much he may profess to be non-communal, however convincingly he may condemn communalism.

The man who has gone through the momentous dramas of the Prince of Wales' visit, of the No-Tax campaign, of the Round Table Conference, of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact to mention only a few and played the role similar in importance to that of the Prince of Denmark in Hamlet—such a man indeed should know.

He looked tired and worn, a picture of gallant endeavour and utter frustration; but a spirit that would do credit to Robert Bruce. For he is always prepared to try again—as he is trying now.

He revived the days of the Home Rule League, set up in the last years of the last war. He showed me a picture of its members. There were Horniman, then looking quite young and handsome; Jinnah, young and pliable with more country in his heart than community; Bomanji who donated a lakh and a half towards promoting the League's laudable designs; Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Umar Sobani and Banker. There were several others in that historic photograph.

The League which had hoped to build up a powerful united front for freedom was dashed to the rocks by the strong and corroding forces of power politics as they gradually gained on one member after another till the entire original body resigned. This is the story, this is the fate of all endeavour in the direction of independence.

*

*

*

I felt puzzled. If Dr. Jayakar was so convinced about the growing influence of power politics, I wondered if he saw any idea in joining the conciliation committee founded by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and of which Dr. Jayakar is one of its most eminent members.

He, however, cleared my doubt in a moment. Oh yes, he said, there is a great deal of idea in calling the committee. It will be able to lay down a solution before the country and if it is reasonable, if it is acceptable to the country, its constitutional principles may be adopted.

I persisted. Since Jinnah had so errantly and arrogantly turned down the suggestion of any association with it, how did the doctor reckon on reaching a solution acceptable by all, unless it is by conceding the two-nation theory.

Don't forget, was the reply, that this is a *non-party* body. It aims at looking to the interest of all parties, not any one in particular. In recommending the main principles of the future constitution, it will try to play fair with Jinnah, but not partial to him. Whether he accepts it or not is not the responsibility of the committee. The committee's purpose is to present something just and fair to all. In its recommendations it will try to be representative of all opinion.

This gave me an opening for another question. Is the committee representative in its membership? I courted the repetition of the reply that it is non-party. Every member so far selected is capable of understanding sympathetically the several interests requiring consideration. Neither individually the members nor collectively the committee have any axe to grind.

It is a departure from all other committees with similar ends in view. They always came to naught because they had party-men among them. Not a single partyman will be found in Sapru's committee.

But don't you think the committee is too unwieldy to be able to move fast, was another question that occurred to me, recalling as I did the frequent inclusion of new members on the committee.

Dr. Jayakar agreed it was too large and added that the original intention of Sir Tej Bahadur was to restrict the numbers. But growing pressure from various sides—for instance, Dr. Ambedkar, gradually heading to be another Jinnah of his class, the Untouchables, thought there was no one on the committee who knew enough about his case—compelled the chairman to enlarge the size of the committee, while strictly persevering with the non-party men rule.

Dr. Jayakar however did not think that the numbers would hamper the working of the committee. They were all reasonable, well-balanced men, experts on their own subjects, who would make a thorough study of the matter entrusted to their care before pronouncing an opinion.

They were all divided up into various sub-committees who worked independently of each other. Dr. Jayakar is on the most important of them all—on the committee for drafting an outline of the constitution with particular regard to the interest of the minorities. All these committees will arrive at their individual conclusions and make a report for discussion and deliberation at the meeting of the main body.

How long do you think it will take before the committee can be ready with its report?

The committee hopes to be ready by April. I thought it would be pretty fast work if accomplished. Yes, the members are very serious about it and are devoting as much time to it as possible, at great personal self-sacrifice. Dr. Jayakar himself is laying aside all his other work and engagements to be able to concentrate wholeheartedly on the job before him.

I wondered what gave Sir Tej Bahadur the idea of this committee in the first place. Surely all those suggestions that he was influenced by Gandhi or Wavell were groundless?

Quite, I was assured, they had no foundation of fact, particularly the canard about Wavell.

The bureaucrats do not care two hoots for reconciliation among ourselves. Why should they care? It suits them. And we are "chumps" enough to play their game. As for Gandhiji, he approved the idea, but did not inspire it.

Yes, Dr. Jayakar is convinced no one has inspired it. Sir Tej Bahadur and he have worked too long together not to know the working of each other's minds inside out. It was that old "Try-again", that "Go-between" spirit—that urge never to rest and never to rot, never to submit and never to yield, never to accept the inevitable as the irreparable—that was probably responsible for this Sapru surprise on the country. What fruit the effort will bear, time will tell and it will be the country that will pass the verdict on its worthiness.

*

*

*

A last fling—I tried to eke out some clue to the proposals that may be in the offing. I can say nothing, came the affable but impenetrable reply. I was reminded of the beginning—and I knew the end had come. But I was well satisfied.

I had got the indefatigable campaigner in India's cause talking, perhaps, without his realising it. He suddenly seemed to wake up to the realization of the time he had spent with me. I can give you only fifteen minutes, the doctor had warned me when I made the appointment. It was now *an hour* and fifteen minutes.

There were a pile of papers on his table. He had better return to them. His wealth of anecdotes which he was reeling off to me with an amazing facility of recollection and a power of expression which was not devoid of drama, came to a stop. It was not exhausted in its capacity but arrested in its flow . . . perhaps another time.

The great trier smiled wanly as he got up to bid me goodbye. His expression bore the stamp of one of those few who have done so much for one's country—and been rewarded with so little.

10th February 1945.

CHAPTER V

SIR CHUNILAL MEHTA TELLS INDIA HOW TO GET ON WITH AMERICA

I HAD been waiting half an hour. My patience waned. I scribbled out a note and handed it to the *bhaya* as I got into my car. Give it to Chunilal Sahib when he comes, I told him. The *bhaya* looked back wonderingly at me. Was I waiting all this time for Sir Chunilal? I would have to wait a week at least and not just half an hour. He was in Madras.

Madras? I yelled back, horrified. But I spoke to him two hours ago.

The *bhaya* got curious. Which Sir Chunilal did I want anyway—B. or V.?

Bhaichand, I said.

Oh, Chunilal *Bhaichand* Mehta, he lived a few doors away,



Mr. Ghanshyam Mehta — Lot of stuff in the staff

the green gate, enlightened the *bhaya*, as thoroughly amused at the situation as I was annoyed.

That was not all. When I eventually located the Mehtaji I wanted, he said, don't you know how to keep your time? But the vivacious debonair ex-Sheriff of Bombay burst out into uncontrollable laughter when he heard my story—a story of mistaken identity!

*

*

*

Mistaken identity, however, is something more tolerable than unmistakable ignorance. *Bona fide* may be, but still unmistakable.

That is the impression Sir Chunilal Bhaichand Mehta gave me of the impressions he gathered in America which he visited recently as leader of the Indian Delegation to the International Business Conference. At one of the functions Sir Chunilal attended, a Britisher—mark well—was telling Americans that fiscal autonomy had existed in India since 1922 whereas fiscal autonomy can never exist in India until Government and the legislature agreed, which they have never done and never will. Another impression which Sir Chunilal had to correct was the make-believe that India wanted and liked sterling accumulation whereas, in fact, it had been forced upon us.

Is the American Press full of this ignorance about us too?

Sir Chunilal laughed. It is worse. It has no news at all about India. For instance, the *New York Times*, which publishes 32 pages in its daily and 64 to 72 pages in its weekly, gives sufficient space to every insignificant news from every nook and corner of the world, except India. There are barely five to ten lines about India occasionally. And those lines describe a railway accident in which some Americans may have been involved!

India has never been presented attractively to America. What news they are given apparently does not arouse the Americans, however keenly they may be interested, as Sir Chunilal found them to be, in the affairs of our country.

They are just starved—or fed on the news dished out to them by the British Empire Information Service. They looked very greedy; and Sir Chunilal during his seven weeks' stay tried

to feed them with facts as much as he could. But that could hardly suffice.

What we need, Sir Chunilal told me, is a news service of our own sponsored by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, a regular office with a representative and a staff. Only, he added, scratching his chin in thought, there is the question of expense.

We'll have to spend at least a lakh of rupees every year to maintain even a small office.

A lakh, I looked amazed. Of course ; just a stenographer in America would cost you 200 dollars a month, that is, about Rs. 700.

When would you know, I asked, if the scheme is feasible?

Can't say. We, the members of the Delegation, can only make recommendations to the Committee of the Federation. It is upto the Committee to accept or otherwise.

Supposing we *do* set up this office, I wondered, wouldn't it come into conflict with the British Empire News Service?

The latter got all the information about our commerce and industry but served out to the American public only that part of it which suited their purpose. Hence the necessity of setting up our own unofficial body which would give the full facts and all the information about the state of our trade, commerce and industry.

Sir Chunilal did not foresee any clash between our office and the British Information Service. Our purpose would be just to give the truth, the whole truth which could not be denied, which need not be adverse to British interests.

But would the Americans know which version to accept—the British Information Service's or our office's?

Sir Chunilal's three visits to America have given him the greatest faith in the American power of discernment. They will know which is the right or at least which is more and which is less.

I suggested that I felt strongly that the industrial picture of our country and the political should be painted in true colours on the same canvas for the benefit of the Americans. Only a joint politico-industrial news front would assure respect for us from America.

Sir Chunilal, however, was not in favour of mixing up the two. The same department could not look after both the sides. Another body, another representative may be appointed for the presentation of the political side.

*

*

*

However, from Sir Chunilal's point of view, it is the industrial and commercial side which is the most important and essential.

It is neglected to such an extent that we Indians have not been given the right even to trade in America. The Americans can establish business in our country but we cannot do it in theirs.

Not only that, we cannot become naturalized Americans if we wanted to. The Chinese can, but we, Indians, can't. We cannot even stay in America for more than a certain period.

If the one restriction was shocking, the other was abominable. And we have done nothing in all these years? I asked in rising agitation. We have just been taking it lying down without moving a finger?

We are, however, waking up to it now. Sir Chunilal had set the ball rolling and he wants us, the young men and commercial colony of the country, to keep it going, to kick it along—till we have scored our goal.

Wherever he had an opportunity, at the Conference, at the various other functions he addressed, Sir Chunilal was banging away hammer and tongs at these two points—the necessity of reciprocity in trade relations by a treaty of Commerce and Navigation between India and U. S. A. and that of a Nationalization Bill qualifying us to American citizenship. Not that many of us would want to claim it but for the sake of our prestige, our proper pride, the right must be reserved for us.

I should have thought that at this rate we are not much better off in America than what we are in South Africa. We are very excited about our treatment in the land of Smuts. Why aren't we doing anything to retaliate these humiliations?

Oh, it's not so "smutty" as all that, Sir Chunilal hastily corrected me. We can stay where we like in America; we can get where we like. Americans mix freely with us. We are treated with attention and respect.

Take Sir Chunilal's own experience. He and his party were treated to splendid receptions everywhere and at the Conference they were treated with complete equality. The Press, indifferent at first, had fawned on him after his well known amendment was passed, namely, "it is recognized that economic competition in world markets for disposing of a country's surplus, by giving a subsidy, thereby enabling the exporters of surplus countries to compete in world markets, is not desirable."

A large number of correspondents from various important American papers interviewed him. Even the *New York Times* departed from its rule of reporting only railway accidents in India as items of its news about our country, and gave fairly good publicity to Sir Chunilal and his team.

Oh no, in spite of the lop-sidedness of business relations, in spite of the ban on naturalization, in spite of our having to quit after a certain time, there is no parallel between America and South Africa.

It cannot be doubted that America has goodwill and sympathy for India. It is conscious that India is a coming country. It is intent on promoting its trade and commerce here, and so it will try its best to be on good terms with us.

The present Government of India has done nothing; indeed, it has intentionally neglected taking any action in these two matters of vital importance to India in her relations with America. Now is high time for Government to bring all the pressure they can to bear on America. Let them stop at nothing till America has submitted to our righteous demands.

For, Sir Chunilal, the expert businessman, the director of a number of companies, a long-standing member of the New York Cotton Exchange, full of "riches" of experience in international commerce and industry, such a man visualizes—and we have every reason to pay heed to his vision—that in our own India to come, America is going to play a great deal of part.

It is up to us to see that in the ensuing game of profit and loss the profit will not all be theirs and the loss all be ours as it is now, that the "earnings" will be shared and the losses will be divided.

This alone would ensure the prosperity of commercial India. Industrial advancement alone would make political independence worthwhile.

17th February 1945.

CHAPTER VI

MR. JUSTICE M. C. CHAGLA PASSES JUDGMENT ON BOMBAY UNIVERSITY SCANDALS

TALEYARKHAN, you do not understand my position. A judge of the High Court cannot give interviews. He does not court publicity. It is just not done.

These were the Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. C. Chagla's words—admirably polite but alarmingly positive, as I was persistently pegging away at him to talk to me on the erudite erosion of our University.

I assured Mr. Chagla that he would not be courting publicity by my courting his views. And as for his views he had already spoken quite freely on the subject from the floor of the Senate. The Press had them. Everyone knew them. Wouldn't he please imagine he was still standing on the floor of the house, answering my questions?

The judge took a puff at his pipe in reflection. Well, what exactly do you want to know? he broke down.

I knew I had won. The public service which he knew his views on the matter would render, persuaded him to yield. He does not believe in gagging the Press. On the contrary he feels most grateful to it for helping to create the right atmosphere among senators by giving its unstinted and unanimous support to the action taken by the Senate against those who had planned a veritable Guy Fawkes plot to blow up the reputation of the Bombay University.

Every great cause needs a proper atmosphere and but for



Judges Unive sity case

the valuable co-operation of the Press, from the Anglo-Indian down to the national, the voters would not have felt so confident as they did when the crucial moment of deciding to take action under Section 17 of the Bombay University Act for the *first time in the history and career of the University*, confronted the house.

It was only the knowledge that the entire Press was behind them, the entire public was with them that the great majority of the senators present at the debate were able to add courage to their conviction to take the momentous step.

Washing our dirty linen in public, Mr. Chagla admitted, was not a pleasant affair but for the sake of the principle, namely, to keep the Senate pure, it was unfortunately unavoidable. It was only by making the public the jury that the Senate could judge so important a case.

It is a pity, I noted, that in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Senate to bring the culprits to book, nothing could be done due to the absurdity of Section 17 which has laid down that a "fellow" can be dismissed from the University only if two-thirds of the entire strength of the Senate and not just of those present, voted for the move.

Mr. Chagla agreed it was a great pity but pointed out that the amendment of Sir Chimanlal Setalvad to the effect that a two-thirds majority of only those present and should suffice, was carried and was now before Government.

And how long do you think Government will sit on it, I asked. Well, Mr. Chagla smiled, Government is a slow-moving body as you know, but in this case, it should not take more than a month or two on the outside.

Though assured about the time, I still felt uncertain about official attitude. So I asked again. Are you sure that Government will not turn down the recommendation of the Senate as they had done in the case of the Sophia College controversy?

Mr. Chagla shrugged his shoulders and said—not unless they take up the attitude that such an amendment in the Act can be made only when a popular Legislature begins to function. But they could treat this as an emergency legislation, since the amendment is most necessary to safeguard the integrity and eventually the destiny of youth.

At most they could insist on two-thirds majority of those present which should not be less than half the total strength of the Senate in order to safeguard against the operation of any clique or coterie of say 30 to 40 members.

After all, for years and years, Bombay University enjoyed the reputation of exemplary honesty in the conduct of its examinations and measures must be taken as promptly as possible to wipe out the slur these unhappy discoveries have cast on it. Government must respect the recommendations of the eminently qualified men who constitute the Senate.

And when Government has accepted it, I enquired, will you throw out the "fellows" after all?

Oh no, you can't prosecute a man twice for the same offence, I was told. I should think that if these fellows (without inverted commas this time) had any self-respect, they would resign of their own accord after such shameful behaviour and such severe censure of the Senate and the public.

Naturally, Mr. Chagla couldn't pronounce an opinion on that, so I proceeded to ask him, hasn't this been going on for some time? There must be much more to it than what has already met the eye.

May be, said the "judicious" senator, for the last several years, we have been smelling the rat, we knew it was lurking, but we could not trap it. There were no proofs we could lay our hands on.

As soon as we did, however, you cannot deny, continued Mr. Chagla, appealing for the credit the Senate fully deserved, that we took the most drastic action possible. It has had a tremendous effect and in future, potential offenders will realize that they cannot behave in this manner with impunity.

It called for great guts on the part of the University to expose its own members and the very fact that 85 out of 110 present voted for the move to remove the offenders was ample evidence to prove how honourably the University had discharged itself in the matter and how jealous it was of its fair name.

Yes, you people, said Mr. Chagla, meaning the Press, should have given the University its meed in this respect. And he capped it by adding that he came down all the way from Mahableshwar to attend the meeting called immediately on the location of the

serious offence.

I assured "milord" that the Press was fair-minded and would give credit where it was due, but could he deny that the conduct of the University affairs was not all that could be desired, that its machinery needed oiling up very badly?

Mr. Chagla had his explanation ready on his tongue's tip. In those days, barely four to five thousand used to appear for the Matriculation Examination. Today there are over forty thousand and when the number becomes so enormous, corruption becomes inevitable.

*

*

*

Besides, our University has to look after so many places, even Sind which falls outside Bombay is affiliated to our University. Ours is an affiliating University whereas it should be residential like Oxford and Cambridge.

Huge cities like Poona, Ahmedabad, have enough colleges and culture in their midst to merit a University of their own. Sind should have one. Thus an experiment of a residential and an affiliating university could be conducted side by side.

In short, what is needed most badly is decentralization of our University. We must "break" it up if we want it to function smoothly. We must reduce the burden of its responsibility if we want it to concentrate on its academic duties.

The Bombay University Act is also considerably to blame.

You mean, I interrupted, it needs modification in more respects than just in that one section?

It needs a complete overhauling. As it is, more time is wasted in electioneering than on academic aspects which are after all the real purpose of the Senate.

This business of rotating election should be abolished. Members waste most of their time in canvassing. That so much absorbs them that they forget the importance of their work as senators.

Principals of colleges, for instance, are all elected, whereas in Mr. Chagla's very justifiable opinion they should be *ex-officio* members of the Senate, by reason of their office and the position they occupy. They should be the most important members of

the Senate. They are constantly in touch with students and their time should not be allowed to be wasted on canvassing.

*

*

*

Don't you think, I ventured, that another cause for the maladministration is the unwieldy numbers of students who are allowed to appear for the Matric?

Well, what do you propose? asked Mr. Chagla, indulgently turning interviewer.

Restrict the numbers by asking the schools to send up only a certain percentage of students, I suggested. Wouldn't this raise the standard of the examination?

Why bother about the standard? Why not abolish the examination altogether, came the startling improvement on my suggestion. After all, in India the Matric is merely looked upon as a qualification for a job, while the purpose it should serve is an entrance to colleges, as it is in London.

So many appearing for the Matric here have no intention of joining colleges and do not. So, why have it? Why not have only entrance examinations in the various colleges as in Oxford and Cambridge and do away with the Matric altogether?

But, checking his impressive enthusiasm, Mr. Chagla recovered on second thoughts to realize that it is the most revenue-producing examination of the University and till a substitute will be found, its abolition will be a far cry.

Let the popular Government come, Taleyarkhan, said the popular judge, rising with a smile of hope. Then we'll do all these things—and many more. . . .

24th February 1945.

CHAPTER VII

SIR CHIMANLAL SETALVAD CONDEMNS SOUTH AFRICA'S FASCISTS AND OUR DELHI DUDS

THE President of the Indian Imperial Citizenship Association which looks after the welfare of Indians overseas, no other than that eminent lawyer, that liberal politician, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, bade me sit down, and sit close. He is a little hard of hearing.

It was the liberal politician in him that first spoke when I opened my battery of questions on South Africa. The President of an association which the great Gokhale had helped to found, began by criticizing the founder. "If Gandhi and Gokhale had not blundered to begin with, we would not have been in this state today," he said.

What blunder? I enquired.

The blunder of surrendering the principle that Indians in South Africa had a right to be free, the right to be anywhere and stay anywhere they liked, the right to exercise rights of citizenship. This failure was the nail in our coffin and we still cannot get out of that coffin, in spite of all our struggles.

I suggested a way out. Why don't the lot of Indians suffering in South Africa today come out here, to their own country and settle among their own kith and kin?

That's more easily said than done, Sir Chimanlal thought. Just think, Taleyarkhan, he said, there are 200,000 of them. They have their forefathers, families, fortunes, everything there. They have been domiciled and been there for generations. They have come to look upon South Africa as their own country. They will fight to make it their own country.

I saw the parallel. Even as Indians are fighting to make India their own country? Even so, Sir Chimanlal agreed. And even as India will realize her freedom one day, so will the Indians in South Africa win their rights.



Though Sir Chimanlal felt happy about this conviction, he was much concerned about the treatment at present meted out to our brethren, the baseness of it, the ingratitude in it.

Indians, when they first went to South Africa, went expressly at the begging invitation of the South Africans who wanted their land developed, who sought Indian labour to make it what it is today. And today that their work is done, their need is over, they are giving us humiliating kicks to reward us with.

They would only welcome my suggestion, Sir Chimanlal told me, to get the Indians to quit South Africa. This is precisely what they want, so they could seize on our businesses, on our interests, our lands—and make even more exploiters' hay than they do.

Every day they are dumping more humiliations on us. Indians cannot travel first class. They cannot walk on footpaths. They have special seats reserved for them in trams as if they were untouchables. They are not taken up by lifts. The experience of the Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Sastri is well-known when as Agent-General he was visiting a certain institute whose liftman refused him entry into his lift but admitted his secretary who was a European.

No distinction is observed between any class of Indians. No respect is paid to our most highly posted officials. They are all treated alike with contempt. *Even the South African liftboy is a superior being to the Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri whom the world holds in the highest esteem.*

It smacks of Hitler's Aryan theory, the superior race. It is the spirit of Fascism at its worst. And these hypocrites are today helping to wage a war against the flesh of their flesh, the soul of their souls, the Fascist.

Even the black population of South Africa is treated with a little more consideration, or to be accurate, with a little less contempt. About twelve lakhs of them have been conceded franchise, even though they are compelled to elect only a European representative. They cannot sit in Municipal Council or Legislatures. But still it can be said that they have at least some form of representation. Indians have none in whatever form. No franchise of any kind.

Before the war even the Japanese, residing in South Africa, had full franchise and this, Sir Chimanlal said, was on account of Japan's power and position. There were no restrictions of whatever kind on that yellow race with the confirmed Fascist politics because the South Africans feared their strength and probably secretly shared their views.

They know that we are powerless. They can afford to care two hoots for us and for our Government, a mere mouthpiece of Whitehall. Not until India becomes self-governing, Sir Chimanlal rightly thought, can India aspire to be respected in South Africa.

*

*

*

Till then, I suppose, we'll just have to listen to Dr. Khare's "artillery of words" which are calculated to give continually disappointed hope. But Khare is not the only well-meaning "dud" in our Government. The whole set of them are sailing in the same boat. They are no good at all. There is no solidarity, no teamwork among them. Each of the members is working merely as a departmental head. They have no joint responsibility and take no joint action.

Do you mean to say, Sir Chimanlal exclaimed, that if the whole lot of them unanimously decided to impose economic sanctions, anybody would be able to resist them—no Viceroy can stand up to it if they stood together on the issue.

Instead of firmly resolving to take this only effective measure of retaliation, they would talk of some ridiculous idea of having our own back on the South Africans in this country.

I looked up at Sir Chimanlal, a little surprised. Ridiculous? Does Sir Chimanlal call this righteous retaliation in the name of self-respect, ridiculous!

Of course, it is, Sir Chimanlal smiled back. It would be utterly inadequate. There are barely a hundred civilian South Africans, in our country today, of which not a single one is occupying a post of any importance. Would that satisfy me? I never knew—and I am sure many do not—that there were so few of them in India. Thank Heaven, anyway.

*

*

*

This leaves *economic sanctions* as the only effective weapon

in our hands with which to stab back at the South Africans. But when the country and the M.L.A.'s expected this "stabbing back" to follow on the hitting-out speech of Dr. Khare made some months ago, they were utterly bewildered to be told that instead of stabbing back, Government had decided to pat them on the back!

They had sent out a new High Commissioner—to cap their follies. They knew that the entire country was against the idea; they knew that the entire country would be indignant if they took such a step. Still they took it.

Sir Shafat Ahmed, the retiring High Commissioner, himself told Sir Chimanlal that he was very much opposed to the idea of sending any more High Commissioners to South Africa. The South Africans did not respect him. The Indians did not want him.

When the question was to be decided whether to send out a new man or not to, the Indians of South Africa actually sent a wire to the effect that they can look after themselves, they can protect their interests on their own, they can fight their own battles, they do not want him. So, for heaven's sake, do not send him.

But nobody's sake helped Government to save India from adding insult to her humiliation. She had to take it, our poor country at the instance of her own Government which, having committed the folly, plunged deeper into it instead of retracting and recalling the Commissioner after the hot debate in the Assembly recently. Even the physician in the Government, Dr. Khare, who had flourished the hot prescription for South Africa, far from administering it, fell in line with his Government.

*

*

*

We returned to the prescription the doctor had promised, the prescription of economic sanctions, and the prospects of its early administration. I told Sir Chimanlal that a prominent member of the Assembly who was present at the debate in Delhi, had expressed the opinion to me that we would be the great sufferers and losers if economic sanctions were imposed.

That is true because the balance of trade is in favour of

India. But what should it matter, Sir Chimanlal added spiritedly, if we have to make that sacrifice for preserving national honour?

Agreeing heartily with Sir Chimanlal, I cleared my last doubt about the advisability of economic sanctions by asking him if their imposition would decide the South Africans to perpetrate reprisals against Indians by way of further ill-treatment.

That viewpoint, Sir Chimanlal conceded, is advanced by some, but it is a nonsensical fear. It is because we are taking their bullying lying down that they are pursuing their foul policy with impunity.

Do you think our Government is applying the soft pedal because we are in the midst of war winning which is looked upon as the be-all and end-all of all democratic human effort today?

And what are we fighting this war for, Sir Chimanlal rejoined, for FREEDOM, aren't we? For Human Freedom all the world over. Churchill and Roosevelt have called it the war of freedom, haven't they? What a fine freedom! And anyway, has this question, pray, arisen only *during this war*? Haven't we been fighting for it for forty years now, Taleyarkhan?

Go away, concluded the aged warrior, rising and waving me and my idea dismissal, tell me another!

3rd March 1945.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR HOMI MODY, LADY RAMA RAU, COMMISSIONER MIRCHANDANI AND MAYOR NAGINDAS MASTER PROTEST AGAINST THE TERRORS OF THE REIGN OF REQUISITIONING

THE terrors of the reign of requisitioning were at their height when I decided to record the opinions and protests of several influential and leading citizens of Bombay.

Sir Homi Mody had just returned from Delhi and had heard much about the housing mess in Bombay even so far away at the Centre. He was indignant at the racket of requisitioning that was doing havoc in the city and evinced an earnest interest in the plight of the ejected.

At the Centre, there was hardly any knowledge of what was going on in India's biggest and most important city. Up in Delhi they never see any of the Bombay papers. The Delhi bosses claim to be far too busy to take notice of what happens to local residents summarily asked to "scram"—the undignified manner of requisitioning deserves this equally undignified description—from their homes.

Sir Homi felt that the authorities should have anticipated their requirements long in advance. They did not seem to have taken sufficient stock of the situation as it was developing. He added an interesting bit that over 18 months ago, he had raised the issue with someone in authority and had emphasised that there was every possibility of just such a situation arising as had actually turned out.

Sir Homi had urged then that Government should take timely steps to undertake an adequate building programme, as he felt certain that with the war coming nearer East, the demand on the available accommodation in Bombay would be strained to breaking point.

What do you suggest we do, I asked, now that we are in the grip of this terror?

Sir Homi felt there should be greater public agitation. There did not seem to be sufficient consciousness of the horror among those who were not afflicted.

Why has there not been a public meeting, Sir Homi went on energetically, to register protests and pass people's resolutions against this random requisitioning? Why has the city been taking it lying down? Instead of taking up arms in this matter, he added in disgust, look at the amount of fuss that has been made over the proposed requisitioning of the Dhobi Talao Library. Where there is much greater need of human habitation, to be bothered by thoughts of a mere reading room, no matter however old it may be, is a challenge to commonsense.

Later in the day, that challenge was picked up by LADY RAMA RAU, when I went to collect her views. She astonished me at the outset by saying that at her women's conference, they had passed a resolution deploring and protesting against the requisitioning of various institutes which were helping to educate the young—free libraries, schools, colleges, etc.

I was virtually prostrated by surprise. Did the women—that gentler sex—actually brush aside human hardship to consider human instruction? Reading could be done anywhere. Staying has got to be done somewhere.

Lady Rama Rau pointed out patiently how much these free libraries meant to the thousands who had none, who would have no means of keeping in touch with news and knowledge of the world if their only source of information were cut off.

If the library is wound up, the books would have to be stored up, and that meant there would be no indexing and no distribution and loaning of books.

Lady Rama Rau, however, explained hastily that the women's stand for educational institutions in preference to living space should not be regarded as any reflection on women's hearts! They were of course deeply moved by the tragedy of these ruthless ejections. And she felt that it could be easily avoided if only we had the answer to certain questions.

For instance, it is Lady Rama Rau's information that most of these premises are requisitioned to accommodate women in various war services, like the WRENS, the WAC(ITS), etc.

Now are these women doing enough work to merit their staying here in luxurious style at the cost of our own residents? Couldn't they very well be shifted somewhere out of Bombay from where they could carry on their duties just as well?

You will not believe, Lady Rama Rau said, the amount of facilities, I hear, are being provided to these girls, for instance, to those who are in the censor department. Girls who have never belonged to the upper strata of society, who came from a certain class only, are revelling in astonishing luxury, having spacious reading rooms, living rooms, recreations and what not. If this is true why should it be at the cost of not only the comfort but the habitation of our own population?

The *influx of refugees*, Lady Rama Rau thought, is another menace to our city. Our own people have been suffering incredibly on their account. They are told to leave their premises but the refugees may stay on. What sort of law is this which turns out the master and lord of the house and lets the unwelcome guest stay on?

Not only do they stay on, but it appears that they make a fat amount of money by keeping heavily paying guests. They give them atrocious food. They dump three and four in a small room—and charge them the rent of a luxury flat. The poor victims, helpless and homeless, who have nevertheless got to stay on in the city, just have to take it, in the unenviable alternative of 'take it or leave it', that is before them.

Yet Government is not touching these people. On the contrary it feeds them with stipends. Why these refugees with the means of livelihood they have, could not be got rid of from our city and sent elsewhere in the country, defeats sane understanding of the matter.

There must be surely no country in the world even today where refugees are given preference for prolonged periods over the citizens of the particular country. It is scandalous to a screaming point.

I understand that many of the flats on Marine Drive and elsewhere in the requisitioning areas are flooded by these refugees, staying in the grandest style, who had once been threadbare when India's hospitality saved their skin and kept it together.

A useful suggestion Lady Rama Rau made to me was—why not ration living room in houses? There are so many on Malabar Hill, Carmichael Road and elsewhere, she said, where space is literally wasted.

One or two persons occupy huge manors and palatial residences and yet the homeless, those turned out of their flats, have to go a-begging. If space is rationed, there would be no wastage and this problem would be largely solved.

I suggested to Lady Rama Rau that I felt with so many others that there were many other places which could be much more conveniently requisitioned, if requisitioning there must be. She wondered in reply why even after granting the fact that

men and material were being gradually released from the European war for the war in the East, why it should be necessary to dump them in Bombay to so large an extent.

She concluded that she would further like to find out how this requisitioning is done, what system is followed in marking down houses, how and why the particular houses are selected, whether the Collector is supposed to see to the accommodation of those his order has ejected. These are the questions I should ask and for their answers I should see some man in the know.

*

*

*

The man in the know I selected was MR. U. M. MIRCHANDANI, the Municipal Commissioner. Would he help me further with a free expression of his views?

Sorry, he was a Government official.

I agreed, but added, you are also a human being.

That did it. He talked with restraint but with reason.

No one can have any objection to requisitioning in an emergency provided it is reasonable, honest, and impartial. I humbly interrupted to express the average view that the emergency had passed. So it may appear, Mr. Mirchandani pointed out, because there is no imminent danger of the kind whose impact we felt a couple of years ago. But the Japanese war is not going to end in a hurry and its preparation calls for a great deal of concentration of both men and material in our city.

Why in our city only? That, Mr. Mirchandani said, was not within his purview, but he could say—by way of a ray of hope, I suppose!—that Government was still responsive to public appeals, as exemplified by the withdrawal of the order on the Dhobi Talao Library.

Mr. Mirchandani meant to suggest that Government would not and should not turn a deaf ear to further public clamour and since I had pointed out at the outset, the fact of his also being a human being, he added that speaking in that capacity, he felt very strongly that before any requisitioning order is passed by Government, some representative committee of citizens should be consulted.

Unless there is contact between citizens and the authorities

no requisitioning can be carried out to satisfaction. Such a matter must be with the knowledge and the approval of the public or at least their representatives.

*

*

*

I had left the first citizen, the Mayor, to the last—so that he could have the last word.

Why should this appeal of yours arise at all? With this question Mr. Nagindas Master cut me short to begin with. Why should our civilians be told to get out of their homes in the first place? That is what we should resist. . . .

Yes, but how, I asked.

By showing Government the way to meet their requirements without upsetting the civilian population.

And what would be that way?

The Mayor of Bombay explained that Government had enormous resources of material and open spaces. Why don't they build temporary structures on them to accommodate their personnel instead of trespassing on the already insufficient housing of a congested civilian population?

For their war purposes they had already built these tenements all along from Ghatkoper to Kalyan, from Colaba to the suburbs. They are still building them. They have ample space and ample materials to erect these temporary structures. Expenditure could hardly be the question. For when they spend crores on war, what should a few thousands matter where the welfare of a city is at stake.

They could quite easily put up structures elsewhere like the one they are doing now at Sunderbai Hall. The Mayor mentioned a number of convenient places on Marine Drive, the fields of the various Gymkhanas on Kennedy Sea Face, the extensive Byculla Club grounds and other places, which could be profitably employed for the purpose.

So much inconvenience and hardship could be spared to an overcrowded city if this were done. The Mayor told me he did not think there were any tenants among the ejected who were staying in the city without justification for that is the plea of Government when selecting flats and tenements for requisitioning.

I wondered if Government were justified in concentrating

apparently all their "war effort" in Bombay. Why don't they do some requisitioning outside our belaboured city?

Nowhere, said the Mayor in closing, would Government be justified in harassing the civilians whether working in essential services or not, when they have so much space and material to provide for themselves.

*

*

*

Till, however, all the suggestions contained in the views of the responsible citizens I have interviewed are given effect to, let us appeal to the large-hearted people of our city who are comfortably housed, to spare accommodation for their brethren who have been hit this way by the war. You may say, why should we, it is not our war.

It may not be our war. But remember, they are our people.

10th March 1945.

CHAPTER IX

K. M. MUNSHI DEFENDS THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

THE ex-Home Member, the ex-Congress member, champion of Akhand Hindustan, that "much-briefed" lawyer Kanyalal Munshi, abounds in amazing vitality. All day long he labours at law. Almost half the night long, somebody or the other is visiting him.

I was his visitor one night. He was running away to Matheran the next day, to escape, as he said, all of us for a while. He will have earned his escape but I was determined that he would not have it till he had done with me.

Munshiji gave me no trouble. He talked readily. It was a relief. So much of the preamble in which I have perfected by experience was eliminated.

Yes, certainly, he agreed, when I asked him, if he would



K. M. Munshi — Through coloured glasses

tell me what he thought about all the restrictions and indignities then imposed upon the Press by the Home Department of the Government of Bombay.

The ex-Home Member did not hesitate in condemning the existing regime at the outset. The very fact, he said, that so many orders served on the Press by Government were being squashed by the High Court was more than ample evidence that there must be something radically wrong with the official policy of the Government. He mentioned several recent Press *versus* Government duels in which the Press had emerged successful.

Was it then, I suggested, on account of their unfailing defeat that Government had turned in desperation to asking papers like the *Blitz*, *Free Press*, *Forum* and others, for deposits, in order to avoid going to court?

I would rather say, Mr. Munshi replied, that it is on account of war that Government gets off scot-free in spite of its defeats in the High Court. It does not bother to apply its mind to the legal aspect of the case as once it did. In the old days, a defeat in the High Court meant a lot of disgrace to the authorities. Then there used to be a conscientious regard to be right.

Today the edge of their conscience is blunted. The Defence of India Rules have helped to create an autocratic bias in their ranks. And once an atmosphere of autocracy exists, you lose your balance. It has made the Government machinery want to command everybody and demand everything with impunity.

That means, I said bitterly, Government cares two hoots for the decisions of our Courts. The ex-Minister leaned forward and whispered confidentially, not even *one*!

The censure on Government in the Assembly and in the Courts, and the failure of their policy had become so much a matter of every-day routine that they had lost their significance of surprise and disappointment for the authorities.

After I had enjoyed the smart ridicule which Government had begged for itself, I asked Mr. Munshi if he did not think that the Press Act was being very indiscriminately, almost recklessly, applied.

Oh, absolutely, agreed Bombay's one-time law-giver,

Government were making an utterly misguided use of the Press Act.

Then don't you think it should be repealed?

Oh no! was the prompt and emphatic rejoinder. The Press Act definitely has its uses and I want you to help the people understand, Taleyarkhan, that it is not an arbitrary Act. Just because the Defence of India Rules had blunted the conscience of the Government, so far as the right of freedom was concerned, was no reason to condemn the Press Act.

This unexpected advocacy of the Act led me to wonder in what way it was useful, in what way it was anything short of being arbitrary.

It was useful during the times of a likelihood of an outburst of violence when steps may be taken under the Indian Press Emergency Powers Act to curb inflammatory journalism. It was not arbitrary because it allowed the Press to resort to a Court of Law in the event of the deposit inflicted on it being forfeited.

Government cannot forfeit the deposit without having its order tested by the High Court. And the number of times that it has failed to live up to the "test" is proof enough that Government were making a misuse of the Act by employing it as a penal measure.

Mr. Kanyalal Munshi severely deplored this abuse of the Act and said that *never has he come across a bureaucracy of this type*. In England, he added, it was different. The Ministry was responsible and amenable to Parliament. One had to stand up there and defend his actions. Over here there is nothing of the sort. Breaches of every variety, autocracy of every brand of audacity were perpetrated with pride of achievement.

The righteously indignant Home Member of old gave me the instance of a District Collector in C. P. who levied collective taxes on the people of the village on his own authority when even the Provincial Government did not have a right to do so. The people resisted and it was left to the High Court of Nagpur to vindicate justice by holding that the village people were justified in self-defence to resist the illegal act of the Collector.

*

*

*

I felt it was admirable that the High Courts of the country were coming repeatedly to the rescue of the people and saving them, whenever it has been within their power, from unjust treatment.

Mr. Munshi immediately agreed and recalled the large number of orders which have been squashed by the High Courts all over the country in the last three or four years.

The High Courts have stood as pillars of strength against encroachment on the liberties of the people from time to time by the Executive. They have shown that in these days Government in attempting to maintain law and order is all order and no law.

I wondered how in spite of all these legal defeats, frustrations, contradictions of their orders, Government did not stagger under these blows to their prestige and act with greater caution in the future.

Why should they? I was told, the irritating curb of the legislatures is removed—except in some provinces where the legislature is too meek or too divided to resist them anyway.

*

*

*

How would you have acted, Kanyalal Seth, if you were the Home Member today? I enquired trying to put him in his place.

A look of not too distant reminiscence came into his expression. I would have acted only after taking ample precautions and only in extreme cases. I would never have interfered with the legitimate freedom of the Press. I never did it during my time. I. . . .

Just a moment, Sir, I checked Mr. Munshi, recalling my interview with Mahatma Gandhi in which I had drawn the attention of the Mahatma that certain papers had been forbidden from the expression of news and their views at the time of Prohibition, by the then Government. What had Mr. Munshi, the then Home Member, to say about that?

I was wrong, he pointed out, in believing so. There was never any ban on the papers commenting on Prohibition. About three papers were ordered to submit their comments and news about the riots and other inflammatory matters to the

P. R. O. This was done because the city was in the throes of a riot and action was necessary to prevent further outburst of disorder.

But wasn't this tantamount to tampering with the liberty of the Press for which you just accused the bureaucracy in such vehement terms?

Liberty, my young man, said Mr. Munshi, momentarily assuming the tone and authority of the Home Member, must stop at the stage of fomenting civil disorder. When you talk of freedom of speech, you cannot carry that freedom to the extent of tolerating an outbreak of violence.

That was the only reason why I issued the order against the four publications. And Mr. Munshi added, I withdrew it as soon as the danger had passed.

I thought the High Court had cancelled the order, sir?

The High Court declared illegal, Mr. Munshi retorted, what I had already rescinded.

This instance apart, Mr. Munshi could not recall a single case where his Government had ever asked for a deposit from any paper, even in spite of the fact that they were reigning in such disturbed times. Today, when peace and quiet are comparatively so prevalent, there is no justification whatever, Mr. Munshi concluded, in serving these random orders on the Press.

*

*

*

It was nearly midnight. The ex-Home Member who is just as busy today in the practice of his profession, who is serving his country just as much today by defending the rights of its people, looked tired. I had tested him enough.

I had got what I had come for. Vindication for the Press where vilification had been. I felt eminently gratified. No other and no less than the man who governed our province had made a courageous confession of his resentment. What more did I want?

I thanked him, wished him good-night and a good holiday and drove home, conjuring up visions of a national government when there will be no more deposits, no more orders, no more

Defence of India Rules, no more "requisitioning" of our words and deeds, besides our flats and buildings.

17th March 1945.

CHAPTER X

A. D. SHROFF GIVES HONOURS CERTIFICATE TO SIR JEREMY RAISMAN

RAISMAN has every right to be proud of his past. We have every reason to be grateful for it.

This was the verdict of Mr. A. D. Shroff, Tata's—and India's—financial genius, on Sir Jeremy Raisman on the eve of the latter relinquishing his office as Finance Member to the Government of India.

The verdict may not be a popular one but Mr. Shroff spent over half an hour convincing me that it was at least fair and just.

In his opinion, Raisman has done certain things which any Indian Finance Member would have been expected to do. I thought this was very unusual for an Englishman. How can you prove it, Mr. Shroff?

In reply, he recounted several outstanding events in the career of Sir Jeremy. Two of them in particular deserve mention.

One: The negotiations he carried on with the Government of the United Kingdom regarding the apportionment of financial burden between India and the United Kingdom, arising out of expenditure on defence. Mr. Shroff considered this to be a great service to India which is not sufficiently recognised by Indians.

Two: The manner in which Raisman conducted himself as leader of the Indian delegation to the International Monetary Conference at Bretton Woods. Here, Mr. Shroff, a delegate



Financier A. D. Shroff — to quote own 'figure'

himself, had an opportunity of studying Raisman's worth at close quarters and he noted with admiration the teamwork which Raisman had achieved among the members of the delegation—a teamwork which may not have been quite natural to expect considering that there were official and non-official elements in India's team.

His success did not end there. He carried it further by giving a very full and unequivocal explanation of Indian public opinion with reference to sterling balances, and that at a time when Britishers were very sore about the matter. It called for considerable courage of conviction to go through with it under fire of his own countrymen.

*

*

*

It is quite evident, Mr. Shroff, I pointed out, that you firmly believe Sir Jeremy had genuine sympathy for India.

Oh, no doubt about it, "A.D." rejoined, have you any? And without waiting for my reply, he continued, his successor is a dark horse and unless he keeps up the attitude of Raisman, Indians may well have cause to regret the loss of Raisman though at the moment they appear to be indifferent to it.

He is one of those few Englishmen who does not represent the mentality of Clive Street. He has been fair and reasonable throughout, having a very progressive mind even in the political field.

You mean, sir, that Raisman would welcome a National Government for India?

Mr. Shroff said that Raisman had repeatedly declared himself in favour of it and assured me that if it were to come overnight, our retiring Finance Member would not be sorry for it because he fully realized the inevitability of meeting India's righteous demands.

At this rate, I pointed out, Raisman could not be a hot favourite in England. Mr. Shroff agreed that he may not be well received and deplored the failure of India to appreciate the risk of forfeiting his own future, his own interests, which Raisman has run in his conscientious anxiety to serve this country's as impartially as he could.

We over here do not appear to realize the amount of influence which the City of London has over vital decisions of policy in Empire and other international issues and Raisman by obtaining a very satisfactory settlement of war expenditure and by fully associating himself with the Indian point of view at Bretton Woods could not certainly have ingratiated himself with the high-browed authorities of the City.

India was perhaps not so much impressed by Raisman's term of office for the reason that he lacked the "sugar tongue" of Schuster or the "brilliance and bluster" of Grigg. These are qualities which have always appealed to and carried away the public mind.

But what Raisman lacked in the gift of the gab, in the impressive flourish of putting it over, he amply compensated by his possession of a sober, balanced, a constructive working of mind. He was never in a hurry. He was never impetuous.

The co-author of the Bombay Plan illustrated this by saying that if Grigg were in Raisman's place, he would have forthright condemned the Plan which Raisman studied so carefully and far from throwing cold water over it, offered suggestions to improve it.

We can well imagine the fate of the plan if a routine reactionary Finance Member were functioning. He would have nipped in the bud all ideas of large scale development by ruling out the possibility of raising such large capital.

Thanks, however, to the enlightened imagination of Jeremy Raisman to his considered opinion that in the first five years of planned development, it would be possible to raise a thousand crores, that vast vistas have been opened up for intensified economic development of India.

What would be the ways and means, I enquired, of raising this thousand crores you just mentioned, Mr. Shroff.

The same ways and means as are employed, the same machinery which is mobilized and utilized for borrowing for war purposes. And Mr. Shroff added India does not appear fully to appreciate the psychological impetus supplied by this expression of opinion by Raisman.

But if Shroff saw the brighter side of Raisman's administration, he did not hesitate for a minute to point out where the Finance

Member had disappointed him. His faith in the financier's fairness had been shaken by the satisfaction which Raisman had expressed with the manner in which India has been treated as member of the Empire Dollar Pool. Though Mr. Shroff admitted he was not in Raisman's confidence with regard to how he had presented India's case he would still say that the result obtained by him was unsatisfactory in the extreme.

*

*

*

What do you think of his last budget? Was my last question.

Mr. Shroff believed Raisman had rendered some service to his successors in advance and particularly to those of them who would be members of the future National Government of India, by opening out to them new avenues for additional sources of taxation.

Secondly, Shroff admired his boldness in introducing the Estate Duty Bill and the differential treatment for the first time in our taxation system of unearned and earned money.

Mr. Shroff wished Raisman had done more to solve the problem of earned and unearned income. And sounding a fine and ennobling sentiment, he added that *if the country is ever going to record substantial economic progress, the State as a matter of policy must deliberately discourage the idle rich. They eat upon the vitals of the country in two distinct ways: (a) by living without work when hard work is expected of every person in the country; (b) by spending their unearned income in most anti-social ways.*

In England people living on an inheritance are charged at a much higher rate of taxation. Mr. Shroff sincerely hoped that the new member would take up this matter seriously.

This spirited attack on the idle rich of the country, deserves to be taken up in all quarters in all earnestness and hammered home into the minds of our authorities till they tackle this menace and supply some satisfactory remedy.

This concluded my enquiry into Raisman's past. An eminent financier, a capitalist and a national figure, had given him an honours certificate of exoneration from at least some of the charges that a misguided people have levelled at him.

Indeed I felt that if Shroff admired Raisman, we must admire Shroff for his courage in admitting his admiration.

24th March 1945.

CHAPTER XI

MINOO MASANI CONDEMNS SAN FRANCISCO CONFERENCE

PATRIOT, author, councillor, ex-Mayor, one-time politician, and now a member of the Central Legislative Assembly—all in a mere thirty-nine years of life. . . . This is Minoo Masani.

He always takes a refreshing point of view on whatever you may ask him. Sometime ago I wanted him to speak on what all-India was fervently demanding—the release of her leaders. He refused. It was beneath the dignity of the Congress. So as a Congressman he could not do it. On another occasion, I asked him to help protest against what all Bombay was up in arms—the racket of requisitioning. He refused. It was labouring the obvious.

These irritating experiences fascinated me enough, however, to assure me that when he would express a point of view it would be something unusual. It was. And it was on the San Francisco Conference, entitled impressively the United States Conference of International Organization.

Masani almost laughed, as if to say, International Organization—my foot! What would you call it, I asked, innocently.

"Leading the world up the garden path" was the startling definition I found in the dictionary of Masani's mind. My mind felt a violent jerk. A conference which was aimed at world security for ever and ever, at living happily ever after, had in effect been dubbed a preparation for war.

And pray, why do you think so? I appealed, almost helplessly.

1730
-17

2443



end of foot

Masani answered with a question: if it is really a conference for peace, why are the neutrals kept out of it? Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland—these should be its most respected and honoured members, for they are the only ones who have shown peaceful inclinations in recent years.

The coercion of neutrals like Turkey and Egypt to become belligerents by March 31 at the peril of being left out in the cold is surely an indication that the qualification for membership is not peaceful intentions but obedience to the Yalta dictat of the Big Three.

Speaking in the House of Commons, Mr. Churchill made the admission: that the agreement of Yalta did observe a difference between the big and the small, the strong and the weak.

So, Might is still Right—the creed which this war is seeking to destroy.

Quite, agreed Masani and quoted the *Soviet War News*, as advising small nations to quit trying to play a bigger role in the World Security Organization and to put their faith in the Big Three.

But what makes you doubt, I asked, the *bona fides* of the Big Three?

What doesn't? answered Masani, assuming the role of a prosecuting attorney. Every action of theirs shows their cynicism and their lack of faith in their so-called Security Organization. Otherwise why this grabbing of territory, this aiming at strategic frontiers?

Have you any witnesses to support your theory, Mr. Masani?

Any number—and he reeled off a row of them.

Witness 1—Russia's virtual annexation of Poland in order to have her western frontiers on the Oder.

Witness 2—Britain's grip on Greece in order to maintain her Mediterranean life-line.

Witness 3—Russia's bullying Turkey to get control of the Dardanelles.

Witness 4—Squabbles over the oil wells in Northern Iran.

Witness 5—Antony Eden's statement that if Britain, Russia and the U. S. held together, "they would establish peace for 25 to 50 years".

Is that all the hope they can hold out? exclaimed the "attorney" in triumphant culmination of his argument. Do you think any country intent on peace and having faith in the Dumbarton Oaks scheme would act in such a manner? It smacks very much of manoeuvring for position for World War III.

But who would fight whom in such a war? I asked, feeling tortured at the very thought. Masani hastily assured me it would not be against any Axis powers.

Just fancy, he continued, the Allies want to divide up the occupation of even a small country like Austria between all the three of them, an example of no confidence in each other, the last nail in the coffin of their make-believe.

In short, I came to the conclusion, you think Mr. Masani, that the Allied powers are sticking together just for the time needed to overthrow Germany—after which they will try and cut each other's throats?

Avoiding a direct confirmation, Masani drew my attention to the voting procedure laid down in the Security Council. When I asked him to give me an example, he said, let us assume State X—we won't take names—is a Big Power and a Permanent Member of the Security Council.

State X launches on an act of unprovoked aggression against small State Y, also a member of the Organization. The Dumbarton Oaks scheme provides that if State X does not vote for sanctions to be applied against itself, the World Security Organization is helpless and must sit back and watch its Member-State Y being destroyed!

As if this were not enough the squabble for votes is now spreading to the General Assembly, which will be a glorified debating society anyhow. When the 'Frisco Conference endorses all this, it will have safely "pigeonholed the Dove of Peace"!

A good description of the set-up has been given by H. N. Brailsford in a recent letter to the *New Statesman*: "Three armed giants, each with his group of client States, will dispose of the destinies of mankind by a process of bargaining, in which the counters of the game will be their relative strength in manpower, economic resources, bases, and the solidity of the combinations they lead."

After this, I could not help feeling that all this is only a patch-work and no genuine effort at securing peace, no matter how impressive may be the showmanship to achieve the effect. But I was curious to know how this amazing arrangement came to be reached.

It is grim irony, came the reply, that it is the so-called Socialist State that insisted on this "Polish veto". We may be proud, however, that the only Big Power to protest against this proviso was an Asiatic power, China. Unfortunately, it was bullied into accepting it.

*

*

*

This gave me an opening to ask Masani what part he felt India would play at the Conference.

None whatever, was the reply, India not being free is an object, not a subject, of international affairs.

I suppose, I said, repeating the current flow of popular opinion that this is due to the official nature of the representation, to the exclusion of non-official delegates.

Not at all, Masani retorted. I cannot help feeling India's representatives are ideal in the circumstances.

I was astounded afresh. Ideal! What do you mean, Mr. Masani? The Legislative Assembly, the Press, even C. E. M. Joad in England, were protesting vehemently against the selection of these stooges who can by no means represent the country's point of view?

Masani rejoined with somewhat frustrating calmness,—don't you realize that this is a Conference of Governments, and not of nations? It is therefore only in the fitness of things that official mouthpieces should be sent.

It is widely held, I contended, that Gandhi and Nehru should have represented India at this Conference to present the correct perspective of the country's demands and aspirations.

Gandhi and Nehru can be useful and fit representatives of India only at a *real* peace conference, not, said Masani, at a conference to enforce the edicts of the Big Three, not at a conference which does not even propose to do anything to avert yet another war, not at what Bernard Shaw has described as "the most impudently incredible fairy tale that has ever

amused the pack of children we politically are”.

Lenin once described the League of Nations as a “thieves’ kitchen”. If the League with all President Wilson’s idealism and the very noble covenant on which it was founded could be so described, what can one call the San Francisco meeting?

It would be an insult to Gandhi and Nehru to ask them to join such a gathering, where Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin are expected to be worshipped by reverent devotees and where the main purpose to be served will be to ensure the stability of vested interests and the maintenance of Empire.

At most they could protest for the downtrodden and walk out. Better still, thought Masani, we didn’t walk into this mess at all.

What then is the answer, I wonder; can you hold out any hope?

I doubt if there is one that will satisfy you, concluded Masani.

The hope for humanity lies in the small and growing number of those who see no solution of the world’s problems merely through a military victory of one side or another, but only through a renunciation of force. Such men and women make up what may be called the Third Camp in a world at war—the camp of the common people—brown, black, yellow and white, the camp of the downtrodden, the exploited and the oppressed.

My talk ended. I left Masani’s room a sceptic. For even if we may not like to share his dreaded vision, we cannot help admitting, however reluctantly, the necessity of paying heed to it.

7th April 1945.

CHAPTER XII

DR. JAYAKAR CLARIFIES SAPRU PROPOSALS

IN a previous chapter I dealt with the prospects of the Sapru Conciliation Committee. In this, Dr. Jayakar is discussing with me its results, and removing the various misunderstandings

that followed in the wake of publishing the Committee's recommendations.

The very first one was that many people were taking these recommendations to be the report of the Committee. The report was not published then. The recommendations had to come first for the reason that certain upcountry papers had lost their patience and were weaving fantastic stories out of their imagination. To nip them in the bud, before they could do any harm, the recommendations were rushed to the rescue as a forerunner of the report.

How were these recommendations arrived at, Dr. Jayakar?

They were the result of very fast but very assiduous work. As soon as the reports of the various sub-committees were received, the main Committee met to consider them and reached their conclusions after eleven days' deliberation—from the 29th March to the 8th April.

What were the principles which guided the main Committee in its work? was my next question to this most active member of the Sapru Committee.

There were two:—The unity of India and joint electorates.

The Committee were of the opinion that separate electorates had introduced poisonous virus which was responsible for the ultimate development of the two-nation theory. The Committee were further encouraged in the view they held by the memoranda received from a number of important Muslims, opposing division and supporting joint electorates with reservations for Muslims. The Committee were thereby seeking to avoid the sowing of Lord Morley's proverbial "dragon's teeth" which portended a "bitter harvest".

Do you think, I asked, that the "bitter harvest" would be avoided by just the introduction of joint electorates?

If it goes with parity, as it is intended to be, then why not? challenged Dr. Jayakar. Parity is a safeguard for the minorities. By granting the Muslims an equal representation, it removes the fear of any domination from caste Hindus.

As I understand the reaction today, I said, the Hindus are dissatisfied with parity because they feel it is absurd to put their majority of 51.3% on an equal footing with a minority community of barely 27%. The Muslims are dissatisfied with

joint electorates because they feel that the Hindus would elect only those Muslims who were their henchmen. What sort of "conciliation" is this which has not the approval of the two principal communities in the country?

Dr. Jayakar retorted that the rejection of the committee's proposals by extreme sections of the communities is likely to be regarded by some as a merit and not a disqualification.

He admitted, however, that the term "conciliation" might have been used inadvertently. Sapru himself announced it as a sort of conciliation switchboard which after establishing contact with various leaders, parties and schools of thought would find some solution, fair in its opinion and on its responsibility, to one and all. It would then be open to political parties to accept or reject it. The proposals would stand or fall according to their merits.

Is that the only explanation you can give which will account for the dissatisfaction of the Hindus and Muslims with the proposals?

Dr. Jayakar felt that the fears of both the parties were unfounded but at the same time, he could not help them. The Hindus who criticized parity forgot that it went hand in hand with joint electorates; and the Muslims who criticized joint electorates forgot that it went hand in hand with parity with the community which is alleged to exercise domination.

With the Muslims the question is whether they get adequate price for the forfeiture of Pakistan. With the Hindus the question should be whether they will pay the adequate price. And the Committee thought that no price was too much for the Hindus to pay which would help to keep India physically undivided and remove the virus of separate electorates.

The talk of parity was not started by the Sapru Committee. It was already there. Parity has been there in the Governor-General's Council all these years. It is there in Bhulabhai Desai's proposed ministry—and that is a much worse parity because it is between Congress and Muslim League and not between the two communities. It is there in Sir Sultan Ahmed's book, "A Treaty Between India and the United Kingdom", and also in some correspondence carried on in London by an important Muslim. Thus the Committee didn't give birth to the idea of parity. It merely coupled it with joint electorates.

But how will you satisfy the Muslim League with the joint electorate?

The astute Dr. Jayakar turned this precarious question into a noble appeal—wouldn't it be better for the nation to elect those Indians—Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, etc.—who are more conscious of their brotherhood and affinity to other communities of India than of their isolation? It should definitely be considered in the light of the ultimate unity and welfare of the country.

*

*

*

Besides parity, what are the other safeguards provided for minorities?

Before passing over parity, I may mention, Dr. Jayakar said, an additional advantage which a minority community has at its disposal. It is provided that three-quarters majority of those present and voting in the Constitution-making Body is required to carry, for any majority community to have its own way.

Passing on to other safeguards for the minorities, Dr. Jayakar mentioned:

Safeguard 2: Statutory representation in the Legislative and Executive Councils.

Safeguard 3: Fundamental rights, recommended for the first time. They fall into two categories: (a) justiciable rights which can be enforced before the Federal Court and (b) no justiciable rights protected by the new Minorities Commission whose functions are to keep a constant watch over the interests of the minority communities and to make a report before the legislature and the government of the day.

If the government does not accept the recommendations of the report, it will have to assign reasons for not doing so. Full facilities will be given to the legislature for discussion of the report and moving resolutions thereon—even condemning government if it fails to take action on the report of the Minority Commission.

Safeguard 4: Residuary powers have been vested in the province for the first time. Some members of the Committee who were present at the Round Table Conference opposed this to the last day but they have now yielded to the concession only in the interests of peace and harmony.

Likewise the powers and functions assigned to the Centre are to be as small in number as possible. Only matters of common interest to the whole of India like foreign affairs, defence relations with the States, etc., would be controlled by the Centre.

Such an attenuated Centre, coupled with residuary powers residing in the provinces, should give as complete an autonomy to the provinces as possible without breaking up the State. The desire of the minorities to develop fully on the lines of their own culture or religious or political philosophy would thus be fully met.

Safeguard 5: To prevent a dominating majority from tinkering with the Constitution to the detriment of the minority, provisions relating to the amendment of the Constitution have been made very strict. For the first five years no amendment would be allowed except formal ones—to give a feeling of restfulness and to enable a peaceful working of the Constitution.

What would happen after the first five years? Are there no further safeguards against hasty amendments?

The Committee had not failed to take that into consideration. The intention to make an amendment had to be notified to the public. Six months had to elapse from the date of such notification. Lastly the amendment had to be approved by securing support of the two chambers with a majority of not less than two-thirds of the sanctioned strength.

The safeguard goes further that the amendment has to be approved by the legislatures of not less than two-thirds of the Units and in the eventual entry of the States into the Federation as Units, it would be no exaggeration to say that an amendment will find it impossible to pass these several stages.

*

*

*

The list of generous safeguards for the minorities came to an end. I told Dr. Jayakar that much as I appreciated them, I had two faults to find with them. The first and the more important one was that no guarantee of minority representation in federal ministries was given. It was merely left to the Prime Minister to include "as far as possible" those persons who belong to the minorities. This may mean there need not be a single minority seat.

Dr. Jayakar replied that I was wrong. Clause I of that recommendation makes it obligatory to have representation in the cabinet for all the minorities mentioned and clause II only refers to the adjustment of their numerical strength in the cabinet as a reflection of their strength in the Legislature. It is not possible to have a hard and fast rule on this point beyond stating in general terms that their strength in the Legislature shall be reflected in the cabinet.

Besides as soon as a statutory right—not yet conceded—is given to several important minorities to be represented in the cabinet, coupled with the necessary provision of joint and collective responsibility of the entire cabinet it seemed obvious to Dr. Jayakar that members of the cabinet in order to work together as a team cannot owe allegiance to several communal electorates. They must be responsible to the same electorate. Otherwise teamwork would be out of the question.

What is the other fault you have to find with our safeguards? Dr. Jayakar asked, not with a superior smile of amusement but with genuine anxiety.

I said: You have completely overlooked one minority—the Parsi community. I admit it is very small but since every other community has been accommodated with seats in the Constitution-making body why not the Parsis who have rendered such meritorious services to the country.

By showing me comparative population percentages, Dr. Jayakar convinced me that Parsis—.03%—had no chance of being represented if they claimed their share in the language of percentages.

What about the Anglo-Indians, I pointed out. They are slightly smaller than the Parsis. Still they have a seat. Yes, but they have a special privilege given them by the Government of India Act, 1942, which the Committee had no power to destroy, and they acquired a seat to protect this privilege.

If not in the language of percentages, what about representation for them in the language of service? I asked.

In the language not only of service but importance in the country, Dr. Jayakar rejoined, the Parsis deserve more than their share, as they have in the High Court and in various professions and often in the Provincial Legislative Assembly.

But he assured me that the one seat for "Others" practically meant Parsis.

Why not say so? Dr. Jayakar agreed and said that the full report is still to come out. If they make a representation they will be heard.

*

*

*

I had one last question for Dr. Jayakar. Why was Sir H. P. Mody's recommendation of Pakistan as an economical possibility considered not feasible by the Committee?

Dr. Jayakar showed me in reply a cutting of Mr. N. R. Sarkar's statement on the report "H.P." had released to the press. In it, Sarkar, a member of the finance sub-committee along with Mody and Matthai, has pointed out its defects.

According to the Mody report to make Pakistan an economic possibility, two conditions would be required. (1) That no extra expenditure be incurred on defence, and (2) or on post-war reconstruction. This means among other things that, as Mr. Sarkar observed, the present low standard of living would have to be maintained in Pakistan and this fact, in Mr. Sarkar's opinion, is not an economic justification of Pakistan but just the reverse.

So, to say the least, the two expert economists materially differ on this question! And Dr. Jayakar thought it was not necessary to comment on it!

I was rubbing my eyes somewhat sleepily and noticing it the great Privy Councillor, and the prime conciliator, smilingly observed—"this is the time, Mr. Taleyarkhan, I often sat up to complete my mission."

It was two o'clock in the morning.

28th April 1945.

CHAPTER XIII

VIEWS ON VICTORY—BHULABHAI DESAI,
SIR COWASJI JEHangIR, SIR CHUNILAL MEHTA,
N. M. JOSHI

THE "blood, toil and tears" of Churchill have kept their promise and borne their fruit. Whether peace will be lasting or not, whether this hard-earned victory will be worthwhile or not in the long run, one simply cannot escape at least the momentary jubilation of the relief the news has brought—the news that human blood has stopped flowing by deeds of human hands, the news that a period of peace, call it if you like a passage between the two wars, has begun afresh—after five and half terrible years.

We, in India, did not feel the full physical impact of those years. But we were fully aware of their import on those who were affected. We could not feel their agony. We could not share their grief. But we tried to sympathise with them. We tried to give them strength in their suffering.

For even though India could not regard this war as her own, there can never be any doubt that the vast humanity of India, even in the midst of its own travails, was not blunt to the sharpness of suffering of another portion of humanity, it was not devoid of an indefinable, or perhaps even an unexpressed affinity with the afflicted.

I am not thinking in terms of politics. We must think at this time only in terms of one man to another, domestically not diplomatically. We must think of the many families whose fathers and husbands and sons, if they are surviving still, will return home. We must share their joy. We must think of the thousands of refugees, of the hunted, starving, clotheless civilians of many countries and many towns, who have been rescued from their misery. We must share their relief.

This is not a sermon. These are my thoughts, the thoughts

of the common man, of a nationalist indeed, but of a human being too.

*

*

*

Now let us see what are the reactions of some of our leaders to the Victory-in-Europe Day. I have invited MR. BHULABHAI DESAI to present the nationalist point of view, then by way of contrast SIR COWASJI JEHangIR to give the Liberal angle, followed by SIR CHUNILAL BHAICHAND MEHTA, the businessmen's side, and MR. N. M. JOSHI the Labour's point of view.

First of all we will hear what Mr. Bhulabhai Desai, the eminent Congressman, has to say about his reactions to the news of victory.

Whose victory?

It was his opening broadside. I thought that was putting it pithily in a nutshell. By way of venturing to open the nut I enquired of Mr. Bhulabhai if he felt no elation at the news.

What has it got to do with my country, he retorted. How is this Victory going to contribute towards achieving the righteous aspirations of India? As a matter of fact—and it may be a painful fact to realise—Britain will now have the excuse of this war to impose a regimented life on India, to arrange economy in such a way that they will have everything their own way.

I asked Bhulabhai whether he appreciated the part played by India, in overthrowing fascism. Mr. Desai replied that India has contributed materially to the defeat of Germany in men, materials, and other resources.

But don't you believe, I hoped in vain, that India will reap any reward from it?

Mr. Desai didn't believe that mere cessation of fighting will lead anywhere, in its ultimate result.

It would at least lead to a cessation of bloodshed, I ventured.

Mr. Desai smiled and said that it was a good humanitarian point of view and that as far as it went mankind was undoubtedly the better for it.

I thought that he was indifferent because we have not felt the actual pinch.

This time Mr. Desai didn't smile. In a reprimanding tone he asked me, how can you say we haven't? We have perhaps lost

more in life than any individual country of the West. You have only to think of Bengal, of the millions who died there. What difference does it make whether they died of bombs or starvation. They died just the same. How can you say then that India hasn't been directly hit by this war—just because it has escaped direct hits from bombs?

But don't you think, I persisted, that this victory will remedy this state of affairs?

Victory was meaningless, in the opinion of Mr. Desai, unless there was a solid foundation for peace by the attainment of freedom by subject races. We can judge their plight today merely by looking at the map of the world.

Look at the map of Africa, for instance, the political teacher continued, we will realise in a moment how that country is exploited by the White races. Similarly with us. We are often deceived by the appearances the British put up of enlarging our trade facilities, e.g., by exports to Iran, Iraq and other places whereas it is only meant to further the prospects of their own trade relations with these countries.

I wondered if there was no immediate remedy in our hands on the threshold of this new era in world history?

The answer was instantly and emphatically in the affirmative. It is for Britain to offer immediate National Government to India.

I thought here was a cue to drawing Desai out of his shell about his plan about which he has been so strictly mum. I asked: What form of National Government do you propose?

It was evident in a moment that I didn't know whom I was dealing with, for Mr. Desai rose from his chair and waved an admonishing finger at me—Ah, now you are trespassing the limit, my dear fellow.

I realised what people mean when they say, you can't get past Bhulabhai. I must indeed consider myself lucky having kept abreast of him even for so long.

*

*

*

My next visit was to SIR COWASJI JEHangIR, the Liberal leader. He had more faith in victory than what Mr. Bhulabhai Desai evinced.

To begin with, he thought that the war had greater advantages

for India than most countries in the world, and when I asked him, "what advantages?" he said that in the past we have lost many opportunities of securing self-government. The war gave us yet another which had it been grasped would have surely led to self-government.

Sir Cowasji was obviously referring to the Cripps offer. He thought it was three-quarters of the way to self-government. But even at this belated stage, he hoped, that it was not too late for Dominion Status which he felt certain Government is willing to bestow on us.

As the war with Japan was still raging then, I asked Sir Cowasji whether Government intended "bestowing" (Sir Cowasji's word, not mine) Dominion Status on us just then or after the termination of the war with Japan.

He replied with prophetic vision that Japan would not take so long to be liquidated anyhow. Just as he felt convinced, he said, from the beginning that the Allies can never lose this war, he was similarly convinced then that Japan could not last for any length of time.

My next question was: Don't you think India has suffered a great deal by this war?

Sir Cowasji would not concede the point. What have we suffered, he retorted, as compared to the other countries of the world? Have our fields been turned into bloody battlefields; have our cities been bombed or bombarded, have we felt the horrors of the concentration camps? We have indeed got off very lightly on the whole.

Hearing these words, I was reminded of Bhulabhai's—"Think of Bengal. What difference does it make whether they died of bombs or starvation. They died just the same. How can you say then that India has not been hit by the war—just because it has escaped direct hits from bombs?"

I remembered I was impressed by the argument. I made it my own against Sir Cowasji Jehangir. I reminded him of Bengal and other parts of India, the suffering endured by them.

But the obdurate Liberal would not give in. He certainly sympathised and deplored the loss of life and the food scarcity, but he said that these conditions did not apply to the whole of India and even where they did, they were not entirely the result

of the war. Therefore, he argued, they cannot be compared to its horrors. And he culminated by saying, we have much to be thankful for. We have lived in comparative comfort.

I was about to protest when I remembered that Sir Cowasji had then lost his eldest son in London, virtually a victim of the war. So he had every reason to be embittered against it. And yet he wasn't. He indeed talked of being "thankful".

For what he believed to be the greater consideration of humanity at large, he had minimised the importance of his own tragedy and sacrificed its very thought. Right or wrong, I could not help feeling there was a streak of nobility in it.

*

*

*

Satisfied with having obtained the reactions of two practically diametrically opposite schools of political thought, I diverted my attention to the impact of victory on the world of commerce. I could not find a better representative than the ever-smiling, war or no-war, SIR CHUNILAL MEHTA, the leading businessman and economist.

He was not too optimistic about Indian economy benefiting by the cessation of hostilities in Europe since the war with Japan had then still to be fought out, and moreover since India was to be the main base of operations.

I asked him if I were right in my apprehensions that this meant there would be no relaxation in the present control measures in India.

I was absolutely right, rejoined Sir Chunilal, but he qualified it by saying that the strain on Indian economy would lessen because war requirements so far as war in Europe were concerned will disappear.

What were the prospects of reconstruction, I wondered.

Sir Chunilal replied that we had no such programme in the sense that Britain had. But he added hopefully if we are able to turn a percentage of our war-time production into peace-time industries, just as Great Britain had planned to do, it would be very beneficial. Sir Chunilal naturally felt that it was not possible to say anything beyond just this at that moment.

■

■

*

Finally, a word with Labour champion N. M. JOSHI.

Can you hold out any prospects for the working classes in view of the victory, I asked him at the outset.

The aged leader scratched his not too hairy head. I knew he wanted to say "hardly". But he never loses control of caution and respects the responsibility that his position has conferred on him.

So he began: I am not a prophet. I don't like making prophecies. All he could say was that much depended on the policy of Government. If it did not maintain sufficient employment and allowed depression to come, people's condition would be made worse. Employment was the chief thing not only for working classes, but also for the educated young people employed on war jobs.

This led me to ask Mr. Joshi whether he considered the present Government to be fit enough to meet the magnitude of the task.

The Labour leader felt that the members of the existing Government had no heart in their jobs because they knew that another form of government was waiting on the threshold. And, Mr. Joshi added spiritedly, this new Government must be composed of people capable of taking a bold step—not an ill-assorted body like the present one who have no common plan.

I was curious to know who would decide on this Government.

In reply, Mr. Joshi admitted that due to the unorganized state of our country, where no unity or agreement was possible, a national government can come only after the British decide themselves what is fair and due to the various communities. I thought it was a sad confession but there appeared to be no way out of it.

Mr. Joshi thought nothing of the various reconstruction plans that have been put forward before the country. The whole world is prepared to start on reconstruction at a moment's notice. Not so India. Even years' notice would not suffice. If the Japanese war were to terminate within six months as it may* all our planners will be just caught napping.

Mr. Joshi concluded by hoping that there would be an early

* — and as it did! —

improvement in the political situation and an early end of the deadlock.

* * *

This completed my symposium of views on Victory-in-Europe Day and at the end of them I felt that to have a Victory-in-India Day, it is India and Indians who will have to make the effort to achieve it. Then we will like to see flags and confetti flying about and share the heartfelt joy Europe is feeling today.

12th May 1946.

CHAPTER XIV

KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA'S POST-WAR PLAN FOR THE WOMEN OF INDIA

THE air is thick these days with every variety of post-war plan—except perhaps one for women. I wanted to make sure anyway. I could not have found a better person to ask than Shreemati Kamaladevi, President of the All-India Women's Conference.

The moment I mentioned the purpose of my visit to her, she was all vivacity and vision. She was full of plans and schemes. And she was not filling just the air with them. She had already started on a lot of "ground" work.

Her Women's Conference, at her own initiative, had already started a Women's Employment Bureau.

What was that for?

Well, that's rather obvious, isn't it? Kamaladevi smiled.

Yes, of course, I said, trying to retrieve from the effect of my absent-minded question. What I meant was, for whose employment? Is it for the benefit of those women who have proved themselves so capable in the jobs which the war created for them?

Kamaladevi replied that it was not restricted to them alone but she admitted the feeling that she did not want the twelve thousand and odd women now employed directly or indirectly



Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya — "Folds" of women's rights

in war jobs to think that they were being ignored and forgotten. Those of them who wanted to carry on with another job, after they were discharged from their present one, were welcome to apply to the Bureau which would try its best to fix them up somewhere.

What is the nature of the employment you expect to find for them?

Kamaladevi showed herself very keen about the Health Services embracing first and foremost nursing, then midwifery and here she felt the field was open for the women of India, the chances of competition from men being eliminated, since there was no likelihood of a man applying for the post of a midwife!

India needs great re-inforcing in her ranks of these Health Services. The deficiency in their numbers and the inefficiency of their work are appalling and have resulted in so many precious lives being lost. Kamaladevi is therefore determined to rivet our women's attention on this profession which is so necessarily meant for them, so that it may become decent and the bulwark of prejudice against it may be broken down.

In her statements and her speeches, she has been constantly dinning on this slogan—Wanted young women for Health Services. And she has been as constantly agitating for improving the conditions of the working women, their pay, their quarters. She has been constantly struggling to bring their status and their opportunities on par with those of men.

Her enthusiasm to provide employment for women was truly impressive. Not only did she visualize a great future for them in the Health Services, but also in the line of teaching and allied professions.

I asked Kamaladevi whether her schemes embraced only the employment of women and not their education. That was so, she agreed, so far it only concentrated on employment.

But how could the women take up such responsible jobs without any training, I wondered.

Kamaladevi, agreeing with me, that that was only too true, hastened to assure me that she hoped to make arrangements with various new centres where the authorities of the particular hospital or school could be induced to open classes for trainees.

For instance, the Kamala Nehru Hospital at Allahabad was

one of the institutions which had agreed to help in such a direction. And there will be so many others which would be willing to take up trainees and turn out well-qualified nurses and teachers. However, in order to make an impression on the people and draw substantial response from them, in order to ensure the pulling power of the profession among our women, it was necessary first and foremost to educate them on the usefulness and advantages of taking up such careers. This could be done only by incessant and judicious propaganda.

*

*

*

Health Services are not the only object of Kamaladevi's interest. In *social work*, she also sees a great scope for the women of India. She had actually started an experimental social workers' camp in June 1942 at Abrama where 50 selected girls worked for some three months, gaining a good deal of experience in theoretical and practical work, like carrying on investigations, collecting statistics, etc. The camp unfortunately could not go on because of the August Resolution and its aftermath.

Now again, the idea which was crushed under the political unheaval in the country for over two years, is rescued from the shelf and is being polished up for a vigorous execution. It will be revived in both industrial and rural areas where the need and opportunity for social work are enormous. The Women's Conference has gone so far as to chalk out a scheme from its educational funds on which the Lady Irwin College of Science for Women is run, of starting another women's college for purely social sciences.

But pending its establishment, what do you propose to do? Where will you get the staff? The staff will have to be trained first before they can train the recruits. Kamaladevi agreed with me that the question of a trained staff was undoubtedly a difficulty, but hit upon the solution of finding an original staff.

"Original"? What did she mean?

She meant picking on the staff from various small centres of social work in the villages.

But did such centres exist at all, I asked, because I for one didn't know about them.

Kamaladevi surprised me by saying there were any number of

them, almost on an average of one such centre per every seven villages. The public knew very little of the great work they were doing in their own quiet little way. They set up small indigenous industries, they improved their output, they increased their income and decreased their debt, they thought of new methods of agricultural production and weaving, by means of which their requirements both for food and clothing were fairly adequately met.

So this will be the source from where you will draw upon your staff?

Yes, for the time-being, said Kamaladevi, adding that what India needs is generalized social work, rather than any specialization.

In other words, I put it to the experienced President of the All-India Women's Conference, our social workers should be the Jack of all trades and master of none? Have I got it right?

Quite, agreed Kamaladevi, and as soon as she had, I commented, but Jack doesn't always make good. It is the "master" who does.

That may be true in other countries, was the reply, but in ours where basic education is lacking so deplorably, we must have a sort of team-work. And smiling broadly Kamaladevi rubbed it in by remarking, to achieve such team-work, it is Jack who is essential. The master is useless.

The social worker must have a general all-round knowledge, without necessarily an expert's knowledge on any one topic, so that when teams of social workers go out on their jobs, each will know something about the work of the other. To illustrate her point, Kamaladevi gave me the example of the producer who must have a smattering of everything pertaining to the screen or stage, before he can put up a successful show.

I asked Kamaladevi if she had any intention of coupling her constructive work with cultural uplift. And in reply she asked me to visit the office of the Women's Conference where I would find innumerable booklets and brochures on various subjects which are calculated to provide considerable fillip to the creative side of a woman's nature.

For instance, so little is known about the embroidery of India. Everybody depends upon foreign embroidery, without knowing how much richer and more beautiful is our own wealth of it.

One of these booklets makes such a thing very clear.

Yes, there is no doubt of it. Kamaladevi is going full steam ahead with her programme. It is indeed heartening to see someone not sitting with folded hands waiting for National Government to come before embarking on any scheme.

While its absence is undoubtedly a handicap, we must do the best we can to prepare for its advent. We must be ready with a constructive programme and an army of social workers so that Freedom when it comes will not take us unawares.

26th May 1945.

CHAPTER XV

WITH S. K. PATIL IN CONGRESS HOUSE

IT was in the hall named after the leader of the Muslim League—Jinnah Hall—where, call it by an irony of fate if you like, I found Bombay's leader of Jinnah's bogey, the Congress party—no other than S. K. Patil—hard at work, looking not quite young, nor as yet quite middle-aged, yet presenting a daring combination of the impetuosity of the one and the intrepidity of the other.

A strict adherent of the political code, he was reluctant at first to arrogate to himself the authority of expressing his party's opinion when the only fit person at present free to do so was Mahatma Gandhi. It was only because he considered his views to be in complete consonance with the Mahatma's that he eventually ventured to speak his mind.

It was a bold venture. He opened out his shoulders as it were from the very beginning giving caution short shrift—but at the same time maintaining an immaculate balance of his feelings.

To that familiar question which has been left unanswered for years which is today lurking on the doorstep of decision—the question "What is the solution?" Mr. Patil had two to suggest:



S. K. Patil — Always right!

one—a permanent solution which is not yet in sight,—which is indeed impossible while the memory of the new constitution laid down for Burma is still fresh in our minds,—the other, a temporary one—the best, a people enervated by long years of inaction, can hope for.

But Mr. Patil raised a finger of stern warning, the first condition even for such a settlement must be the unconditional release of the members of the Working Committee. The most important members are still behind bars. Till they are released, no negotiation, no compromise is possible, no matter however plausible it may be.

Mr. Patil was scathing in his criticism of any party which may be trying to arrive at a settlement while the Working Committee is still “indoors”. To formulate or to accept any plan behind the back of the Working Committee, even if there is every likelihood that the Working Committee would have approved of it, is, in Mr. Patil’s opinion, utterly undisciplinatory and even dishonourable.

Only the Congress Working Committee in consultation with Mahatma Gandhi can deliver the goods—is the conviction of S. K. Patil and of Congressmen and other nationalists throughout the country.

Mr. Patil added with real feeling that if Government would only make this gesture of releasing the leaders, everything would be so much easier and the chances of a temporary settlement so much enhanced. We are utterly fed up with this sickening stagnation.

It is up to Wavell. Will Wavell live up to it? Mr. Patil believes he will, not out of any sympathy for India, don’t you believe that, he said—but for the reason that Britain herself is tiring of this standstill of events in India and secondly the Conservatives want to strengthen their political position on the eve of the elections by such a move.

Granted the members of the Working Committee are released, what then?

Then the first thing that Wavell should do, thought Patil, ought to be to invite Mahatma Gandhi and the Working Committee to a conference at which some form of popular government may be worked out for the time being.

But is Congress prepared to arrive at an agreement?

Only too anxious, Mr. Patil assured me. This "do-nothing" policy is getting on their nerves and any action would be welcome. Indeed any form of government, other than the present entirely nominated government of Section 93, would be acceptable, no matter of what party or parties it is composed—so great indeed is the feeling of exhaustion at the stalemate.

Mr. Patil actually aired his sensational personal view that he would not mind even an altogether Muslim League Government for a change. I wondered how many Muslim Leaguers would show the same spirit about a Congress Government.

I asked Mr. Patil if he had any inkling as to what Wavell had up his sleeve and he said he felt it quite likely that the Viceroy would suggest a reshaped Executive Council of say 5 seats for Congress members, 5 for Muslim League, 3 for the rest, i.e., the Mahasabha, etc., plus the remaining two for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.

Following the formation of the Government at the Centre, the provinces may either return to the ministries of 1939 or form a coalition or emergency ministries which would be composed of members from various political parties. And Mr. Patil expressed the fervent hope that by forming such a government—a government by arrangement—equivalent to the present British "Care-taker" Government—it may lead to a harmony of views and a better understanding of each other which are so necessary a forerunner for the formation of a great National Government.

Mr. Patil feels the urge of a change so powerfully even though that change may not be a substitute whatever for the eventual and ultimate goal, because he is convinced that the present state of affairs is weighing down heavily on the morale of the people.

The present regime is a systematic effort to throttle public activity in any form—and to make it subservient materially and morally to a defeatist policy. He railed off a row of restrictions. Take the various controls—control on paper, control on freedom of speech and on the press, bans on processions and meetings though no one is against the war today, the reckless inflation of currency—90% of the rising value is due to it—all these are frightful to a fault, calculated to drug the

THEY TOLD ME SO

popular mind so that it may not be expressed or heard at all. What would never have been dared in peacetime, has been inflicted under the cloak of war which is used to hide away many an act of commission and omission.

In the hour I was with him, Patil had spoken the soul of Congress India, he had given the creed of its youth, he had raged against the oppressors of its people—and the greatest of all his indications, he was prepared to practise what he preached.

For when I asked him, if he would like to edit this article before it went into print, he said, you are welcome to say what you think best, Mr. Taleyarkhan, I never interfere with the liberty of the Press. It was the first time in my experience of the various talks I have had that I came across one who had not insisted on seeing the script.

16th June 1945.

CHAPTER XVI

RAJAJI'S FAITH IN BRITAIN'S LABOUR GOVERNMENT

I MET Rajaji *officially* again just before the general elections in Britain.

The Madras Mahatma, with the shirt on, has remained true to his conviction through thick and thin, no matter what he be called—appeaser, collaborator, defeatist—whatever it suits the public to dub him.

He has stood by his guns with the courage of a lion, always looking for some solution, always trying to make peace, always preaching the path to progress. It must have required great strength to swim against the strong current of Congress sentiment which nearly drowned his popularity—and at times even his sanity.

Rajagopalachari, however, is like Robert Bruce. The blows levelled against his policy may stagger him for a moment but they will never bring him to his knees. In next to no time, he is up and at his task again.

He tried hard to have the Cripps proposals accepted. He failed. He tried hard to prevent the disturbances following the August Resolution. He failed. He tried hard to make the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting a success. He failed. He hoped for a Labour victory in Britain and pleaded for some sort of a ministry in India. He was ridiculed. Now come the Wavell proposals. He is trying again his desperate best.

*

*

*

"I am certain that if Indian leaders want freedom for India, they would have to tolerate ministers and ministries whoever they may be."

These were Rajaji's words in the course of a clarification I sought from this Indian champion of the British Labour Party, of his enthusiasm for Labour prospects—and India's prospects, if Labour should win.

As a matter of fact, it was in reply to my question, if it were true that he wanted Labour to win so they would make an offer to India, which, if accepted, would restore the ministries back to power, that he gave me this answer which may just as well apply to the Wavell proposals today.

It is apparent, Rajaji believes ever more firmly, that never has the time been riper for a change, for the Indian issue in Britain has taken an important shape. It is no longer the irrelevant and non-significant thing it used to be in the past. It has become practically a part of British foreign policy.

For that reason Rajaji wants Labour to be returned because there is a greater affinity between Labour and India than between India and Churchill! No one, I think, even without much faith in the promises of Labour, can deny that. So, Rajaji, as an Indian politician of eminent position in the country, would welcome and strongly support Labour's offer to govern and prove its capacity.

That was very reasonable, I thought, but I wondered what made him say in the press that if he were in England now, he

would guarantee Labour victory. It has caused some misunderstanding here, I told him, tantamount to presumption on his part.

What Rajaji meant was that if he were electioneering for Labour in England today, he would claim that *Labour won the war, not Churchill!* And he would be able to speak more easily on this claim than Labour leaders could do it for themselves.

If Labour won the war as you say, Rajaji, would it not be their duty to win the peace too for Britain? I asked, meaning that surely what the British electorate would want is an impressive programme of activity and planning at home to guide their vote, whereas Labour appeared to be making India the major election issue. I could not figure out how or why the Indian problem could affect the voters in Britain.

Rajaji explained away my difficulty with ease. Foreign policy is a very important matter and as we had already said, India played a very important part in it. Besides, just after the experience of the war, England cannot be expected to go practical in her outlook.

This led me to presume that with the war over, the British people had at last awakened to the freedom their leader promised to all the countries of the world.

Not the Atlantic Charter brand of freedom, but the REAL freedom, not the freedom for the bigger nations to boss and bully over the smaller or weaker ones, but a freedom in the true spirit of democracy.

To redeem this failure of fairness on their Government's part appears therefore to be the principal anxiety of the British proletariat.

So it may be because they want to exploit this outcry that Labour candidates are feverishly backing the Indian cause, giving promises and making statements galore. Will the Labour tune towards India remain the same after election as it is now—or are these extravagant promises just indulged in to get the necessary votes for the party?

Rajaji nearly rebuked me for this outburst. The Indian problem, he said, has not been artificially seized and made big by Labour as I suggested. On the contrary, Labour and Tory are both COMPELLED by the fact to take notice of it and deal with it. Rajaji went so far to add that *if any party ignored it, the British*

electorate is intelligent enough to think poorly of that party.

Labour programme of the past, I next pointed out to Rajaji, has not been very impressive. As you will remember two spells of Labour Government ended miserably. Then what makes you imagine that if they come into power, they will benefit India—any more than the present Government under Churchill?

The ex-Prime Minister satisfied himself by saying that all he wanted was a Government that would honour its pledges and genuinely fulfil them. In this respect, we have a better party in Labour than in the Tories. Further the need for co-ordinated planned economy cannot be escaped and Labour stands for it.

That may be so, I agreed, but how could you put faith in a party whose leaders in the past have been so incompetent and disunited and who today hold such divergent or at least such confused views? For instance, Attlee promises self-government to us in one grand sweep whereas Bevin talks about giving it in doses.

After making a generalization that parties based on family ties and traditions are stronger than parties formed on ideas of progress, Rajaji promptly came to the rescue of Bevin, giving his words a different and better interpretation than my understanding of them. He felt it was the attempt of a party which was seriously proposing to tackle the problems of British Government unlike previous Labour parties to define its position in regard to India.

He interpreted Bevin as wishing to deal with problems of transfer of power through convention and understanding rather than by written constitutional changes that give rise to communal and other controversies.

Rajaji did not dislike this method. But he admitted that due to the fact that Labour were hustled into this election, there was an element of unpreparedness in their effort.

Who hustled them, I interrupted, didn't they hustle themselves?

Rajaji refused to see anything wrong with the decision of Labour to accept the challenge hurled at them by Churchill. He thought it was far better to face the issues at once than put it off till the end of the Japanese war.

THEY TOLD ME SO

British conservatism should not be allowed any breathing time. Once things have settled down, its unwillingness to adopt very great changes would triumph. So, repeated Rajaji, this is the right time for Labour to strike.

The British electorate is alive to the issue and will give it a chance. The trump card in the hands of Labour is the present need for concord with Russia. And that is Churchill's weak point.

Therefore, NOW OR NEVER!

And when I pointed out that the Labour record of seats in Parliament for the last number of years had been very poor, the inveterate optimist replied that though he was not an astrologer, nor did he believe in astrology, he felt certain Labour would win if they kept up this self-confidence.

Do you believe there are many who think so?

Yes, came CR's final "crack" of confidence, "the Tories included!"

23rd June 1945.

CHAPTER XVII

DR. SHYAMAPRASAD MUKERJEE BELABOURS THE
BRITISH AND DOES NOT SPARE THE CONGRESS

I SAW Doctor Shyamaprasad Mukerjee, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, for the first time at a mammoth meeting of the Sabha held at Madhavdas Bagh in Bombay.

First of all a word about the way these Mahasabha meetings are organised. The main speaker is preceded by elaborate preliminaries. Everybody squats on the ground except the privileged press. The preliminaries begin a quarter of an hour before time—and they go on half an hour after it.

They begin before the arrival of the speaker and consist of



Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukerjee — Voluminous Volcano

vocal "political" music which is suddenly interrupted when least expected, by a frenzy of tongue-twisting and ear-splitting slogans, remotely resembling some jungle cries. There are so many "ki-es" Hindu Mahasabha KI and Sri Savarkar KI, etc.—that it is impossible to tell in what "key" they are all shouted!

After more vehement singing of anti-Pakistan songs, the President arrives "in state"—by which I mean surrounded by a hand-interlocked bodyguard. A special dais is raised for him, not with tables or chairs on it, but mattresses and cushions. Mahasabhaites squat all round him.

Then, when you would expect the President to speak—he being already a quarter of an hour late—about half a dozen others precede him, all introducing him in various ways. No amount of looking at one's watch including a glance at his own by the President himself, would check their enthusiasm.

They go merrily on till we think that when at last Dr. Mukerjee would be called upon to give his address, he would only say, "Brothers and Sisters, my address is 77, Asutosh Mookerjee Road, Calcutta," and go away!

* * *

But being more tolerant than George Bernard Shaw, Dr. Mukerjee gave a very different sort of address, an address full of appeal at one moment, of wrath at another, of biting satire at a third.

Like his party, the Hindu Mahasabha, he is full of fireworks. But they should not alarm us, because through the fire of his indignation, his protests and his wrath, we are able to see at first a faint and then a distinct streak of logic and reason, for armed as he is with facts and figures, there is little his critics can do to defy.

It is a pity men of such passionate sincerity and of unimpeachable national zeal even though the cloak they wear may have a communal colour, cannot be teamed up with the national organization. How much greater would be its strength, how much shorter its struggle!

When Dr. Mukerjee started speaking, Wavell got it in the

neck. Gandhiji nearly in the same place for backing him up. And with Gandhiji the entire Congress. The Doctor, a splendid orator, described Wavell's offer of an interim government as an interim suicide. And added that since suicide cannot be only for the time being, it must be for life.

Why did he think so?

First and foremost, because it was a communal conference in which he believed the Hindus were not getting the share they deserved by virtue of their overwhelming population figures.

Secondly, he thought it was a deliberate attempt to break up the unity and solidarity of the Hindu community and so break its backbone, while allowing the Muslims to remain as one solid mass.

Thirdly, he believed it was on that account calculated to cut up and quarter India.

Fourthly, he violently opposed the veto—"no Viceroy is going to shout from the house-tops that he is not using the veto, unreasonably".

Fifthly, the object of the offer was to retain the power in British hands. The Executive would not be responsible to the Indian Legislature. The Viceroy as head of the Executive would be answerable directly to the British Government at Whitehall.

Even though you may not agree with the Hindu Mahasabha President's every view, you could not help being impressed by the manner in which he marshalled his arguments and laid his cards on the table.

*

*

*

The next morning I went to see Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukerjee, determined to differ from what he would say. I struggled to differ till the end, but not with so much determination! The stigma of communalism is so inveterately attached to the person of the President of the Hindu Mahasabha that one takes an instinctive dislike to his views, till he has argued them out with you.

I made it plain to him, at the outset, that I had come to have this talk with him just in order to be fair, not in order to be convinced. That I could never be quite! But I believed in

fairplay, that is, in letting every party have its say instead of blacking-out the point of view with which we may not agree.

Dr. Mukerjee was warm in his appreciation of this policy, especially after the experience he has endured upto date when his speeches and their reception have met with scant respect from the Press.

He does not ask to be believed. He just wants to be heard. And it is the duty of every paper, which preaching and screeching for freedom of speech, which does not wish to reduce this freedom to a travesty when put in practice, to let him be heard.

I began by trying to tie up the doctor in knots in the hope of enjoying his efforts to extricate himself. But he robbed me of my enjoyment by undoing the knot by the simplest method—by quite frankly admitting his helplessness. For when I asked him how he, who always spoke up furiously against the pernicious principles of communalism, could be the President of a communal body, he readily replied—*it can't be helped*.

Puffed up by this easy victory, I tried to snatch another. In your speeches, Dr. Mukerjee, you have always claimed the Hindu Mahasabha to be a political party, serving the country's cause.

Quite so, agreed the party's leader, the Mahasabha's approach has always been national.

I pounced on the opportunity. Then why do you call it the Hindu Mahasabha? Why not call it the *Hindustan* Mahasabha?

Dr. Mukerjee surrendered again. It was a good suggestion, he said. But the surrender was not an indication of any weakness. It was the indication of an open mind, receptive to plausible ideas.

For the rest of the time, Dr. Mukerjee defended his contentions with reason and vigour. When I asked him how he could insist so much on the rights of Hindus alone in his recent speeches on the Wavell plan, which were directed against the element of communalism, he was prompt with his defence.

He was not responsible for the communal nature of the plan. He was, indeed, very much against it. That is why he was so much against the plan and urged its rejection because he took it to be a deliberate attempt to break up and divide India into several disunited, disjointed units.

But, Dr. Mukerjee emphasised, if the Wavell scheme were decided to be accepted just the same, on the basis of communal representation then he would stand on his right and simply will not let the Hindu community be trampled upon.

Trampled upon! I exclaimed incredulously, the Hindu community? The very vastness of it does not admit of trampling upon. If you talk of the Christians, or the Anglo-Indians or the Parsis being trampled upon, there would be some sense, but the Hindus . . . I laughed.

Dr. Mukerjee, however, was in dead earnest. It was no laughing matter. It was a very serious thing. The British were trying to break up not only the unity of India, but even that of the Hindus by quartering them into bits and pieces, while they let the Muslims stand as one solid block. And he added bitterly that the Congress and Gandhiji were prepared to accept this situation to placate Jinnah.

I pointed out that Gandhiji had raised an objection to the term "caste-Hindus."

Dr. Mukerjee did not appear to think much of that objection. It was half-hearted; haphazard. What was the outcome of the objection? Caste-Hindus done away with and scheduled classes introduced. What difference!

He continued: The whole devilish scheme is to reduce the Hindus in the majority provinces to a minority and in the provinces where they are in a minority, to practically an effacement of their representation. Take the example of Bengal. . . .

I was waiting for that to come and I took the opportunity of interrupting. Your mention of Bengal, reminds me of another accusation levelled against you.

The Champion of Bengal, who has done so much to alleviate its misery, smiled and anticipated me. You mean that of being too partial to my province?

Yes, I agreed, and I have noticed it myself in your speeches. He, however, explained that the reason why he always gave the instance of Bengal and Sind was to give the public an idea of what would happen to the rest of India if this disastrous present-day policy of appeasement followed by the Congress, is pursued much longer.

I thought Dr. Mukerjee would appreciate the Congress and

Mahatma Gandhi's effort to arrive at some settlement after so long a stalemate. I told him so.

... He was enraged. At what cost, he demanded, at what cost? At the cost of the country's unity, at the sacrifice of the majority community's interests, at the neglect of the minorities, at the placating of the Muslims, at the acceptance of the Viceregal veto? Rather stalemate than settlement on these terms.

But the Viceroy has promised to use his powers of veto "only reasonably," I reminded him, somewhat sarcastically.

No Viceroy, Mukerjee shot back, is going to shout from the housetops that he is using his veto unreasonably.

The condition of the veto, the Mahasabha President supplemented, can be acceptable only if the power is exercised after the dismissal of the Executive Council. As things stand, there is no transfer of power. I am your leader, says the Viceroy, and I am answerable only to the British Government. The Indian Legislature is treated with contempt.

I pointed out that after all, it was an interim arrangement and that I was in full agreement with Mr. Rajagopalachari's urgent and heartfelt appeal for a change in Government and the apparent desire of other leaders for the same.

Dr. Mukerjee, sincere and honest to the core himself, spontaneously admitted the heartfelt sincerity which is the sanction behind Rajaji's every move. But all those moves are unfortunately only towards conciliation. None towards consolidation. He asked me if I were also in full agreement with the C. R. formula, with the Gandhi-Jinnah talks.

He asked me if I recalled the talk he had with Gandhiji at Sevagram, a year ago, (at which he remembered I was present) when the Mahasabha leader was trying to dissuade the Mahatma from making the meeting with Jinnah just at a time when in Bengal so many Muslims were coming around to the nationalist side, so many had deserted the League, so many were uniting with the Hindus.

I remembered that occasion when, for over two hours, Dr. Mukerjee hectically and desperately argued and appealed to Gandhiji to abandon his project in the interest of Hindu-Muslim Unity—because the talks, Mukerjee believed, were bound to have an adverse effect on the minds of the growing nationalist element among the Muslims.

They would feel that since Gandhiji was prepared to compromise with the League, they should stay where they were—with the League. And so, they did in Dr. Mukerjee's opinion. That was the beginning of the rot. And the rot is still growing strong. More and more concessions to the League as a result they are more and more on top today.

What is your alternative, Dr. Mukerjee, I began somewhat pent-up, since you appear to be opposed to any compromise? Would you rather that we sat tight and did nothing and allowed our minds to rust? Would you rather let thousands of our young men rot in jails for years on end? Would you rather that we did not devise any solution at all to secure their release and ultimately the country's freedom—even if that immediate solution be at the cost of a little of the spirit of the August Resolution? Is this the ideal of your party?

Dr. Mukerjee always likes a strong point of view being taken up contrary to his, so that he could express his own the more strongly. And he did.

You talked about the political prisoners, he said. If the Congress were really sincere about their welfare, wouldn't the Working Committee have insisted on their release at the time of their own? The Congress should have refused to participate in the Simla Conference, except on condition of their release.

Dr. Mukerjee felt that Wavell would have readily given in if only they had insisted. But, instead, he added, they provided him with the opportunity of holding them as hostages—if the Conference fails, they stay out.

The Doctor brought the expression of his feelings to a climax by stating, I would much rather that they stayed behind bars for sometime longer than that they came out to perpetuate slavery.

Come, come, Doctor, I said coaxingly the British are not as bad as all that. They have hostages and things like that only in Fascist countries. And I added by way of winding up the talk—Surely there is a difference between Fascism and Imperialism.

But Dr. Mukerjee had the last word. Of course there is a difference, my dear man, he concluded, the one kills you outright, the other by slow poisoning!

7th July 1945.

CHAPTER XVIII

WAVELL PROPOSES, DR. JAYAKAR DISPOSES!

OF all the views and opinions that were being expressed and of all the statements being made by leading men in the country on the Wavell proposals, then in the penultimate round of their culmination, the most conspicuous absence was that of any word from the distinguished Privy Councillor, The Rt. Hon'ble M. R. Jayakar.

I asked him the reason for his reticence.

So many have asked me to say something, he began, but the Conference being confined to two main parties and as minority men like me have no place in it, it would be useless my saying anything.

I have brought myself to believe many things I haven't wanted to, but I simply could not gulp down that anything this famous intermediary may say could be reckoned as useless.

I wondered for a moment whether he felt piqued at his exclusion from the Conference.

When, however, I expressed that sentiment to him, he laughed it out and in order to convince me he was neither smarting nor suffering from a wave of self-pity, he began to talk. . . .

He was delighted the Congress had decided to accept office. If he could have had his way, he would have got them to do it a long time ago. However, better late than never. The way he said it rather reminded me of a pretty maiden refusing good offers during her day and being prepared to accept anything as she feels age creeping upon her.

In Dr. Jayakar's opinion, the Congress have missed several good offers, the best being the Government of India Act, 1935. and after that the Cripps offer.

I told him it was generally believed that the Wavell one was one better.

How could it be? he asked. It is after all only an interim

arrangement whereas Cripps offered us a future government.

Wavell has given us foreign affairs. Isn't that an improvement? I pointed out.

Dr. Jayakar was inclined to believe that control of foreign affairs was just a spectacular name without any significance.

It did not mean that we could conclude treaties with foreign powers or declare war on them. The army was still under the Commander-in-Chief. Even relations with foreign States were excluded from the portfolio. So all it meant was that our foreign minister would be allowed to deal with places like British Guiana or the Union of South Africa, which is done even today by Dr. Khare as member of the existing Council.

However, Dr. Jayakar was not deriding the Wavell Plan. He was just stating that it was a step-down from the Cripps offer which the Congress, then in the heyday of her beauty, jilted with scorn, but now, having lost her looks, is toned down enough to accept even a substitute!

Of course, Dr. Jayakar asserted vigorously, the Congress had done very well in acting as it had. But the trump card, it could not be denied, was played by the British.

They had actually got the Congress to agree to support and co-operate in the war effort against Japan, this very Congress which less than three years ago was barking away that it was not our war, whose leader Mahatma Gandhi was saying that the British should deliver to Hitler whatever they possessed rather than fight a war of violence. . . . This was indeed a great achievement for the British!

But, I commented, India has been helping the war substantially in men and material anyway with or without Congress co-operation.

Yes, but don't you see, the astute Dr. Jayakar smiled, legal light beaming in his eyes, now the British have contrived to get our own Government to help the war effort. Now it will no longer be a question of volunteers and "rice-soldiers" supporting it at the instance of the British, but the entire country supporting it at the command of their own National Government.

A stitch in time saves nine. They know that India will have to be made the basis of operation for carrying on the war against Japan. We know that some lakhs of troops are coming

to India for the purpose. They will have to be fed, clothed, lodged.

The British want to escape the odious onus of having to provide increasingly for them at the expense of the civilian population. Far better if a government composed of Indians undertook it. Get them into power and make *them* do the job.

There is a Marathi proverb which says—Get the guest to kill the serpent. If the serpent is killed, all's very well. If the guest is killed, at least, you, the host, are safe! That's the substance of the transaction the British are pulling off with ingenious dexterity today with the Indians.

The fact the Congress have agreed to plunge the country into greater hardship, more privations and stringent taxation so that a mortal enemy may be defeated, is indeed a feat of British diplomacy, which we cannot fail to acknowledge with admiration.

Now they will be able to say as the German judge said to a British prisoner in the dock when Lord Haw-Haw testified against his own countrymen—"we are not making any charge against you. Your own countrymen are condemning you." Similarly, we are not asking you to bear the burden of the war. It is your own Government that is doing so. What a bargain for the British!

But, though Dr. Jayakar saw the benefit to be mostly on the side of the British, he admitted that there were great potentialities in the proposals. He contended that if we wield this power with tact, moderation and sagacity we could make a great advance and use it as a powerful instrument for attaining independence.

I wondered how that would be possible in view of the veto and the irresponsible nature of the Executive. I quoted to him what Shyamaprasad Mukerjee had said to me, that the Viceroy is still our leader and the British are still our masters.

Dr. Jayakar replied that it was a necessary evil. The British fostered the fight between the Indian communities. It is up to them to end it. We have shown our inability to do so ourselves.

So, it can only be through the good or bad offices of the third party that we can arrive at some understanding among ourselves, and until that understanding is reached, the British

will remain as the Controller of Political Power Rationing in India.

The distinguished legal authority made light of the veto. That is only in name. No Viceroy would dare to use it with such top-class men as Azad, Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad and others in power. And besides, the Viceroy is no longer the partisan he used to be.

The appointment of a High Commissioner for Britain to look after British affairs in India has neutralized the position of the Viceroy. He will be no longer an espouser of British interests, but a judge who will weigh the pros and cons on both the sides.

Do you think the deal will get through—in spite of Jinnah?

Dr. Jayakar pursed his lips and said deliberately—“*If I were the British Government, I would not hesitate for a moment.*”

And he added that the League cannot afford to remain out of power antagonizing the British. Even among Jinnah's followers, deafened by the cry of Pakistan, good sense will ultimately assert itself when they see the rival organisation—the Congress—wielding power and responsibility.

If only the Viceroy were inspired with so much finality, we would have a new government tomorrow.

Dr. Jayakar felt that the Congress panel was a first class one, culled as it was from the best brains in the country.

He was very glad that in making their selection to the cabinet the Congress took a non-partisan view and he hoped that in the future, they will maintain this attitude.

Dr. Jayakar has believed all his life that only by way of response and co-operation, by taking what comes and by fighting for more, will India be able to make a headway towards independence. That is the gospel which Dr. Jayakar has been preaching all these years—so long in vain.

Today at last, they have come round to his way of thinking and he rejoices in the vista of a free India which he sees opening up before him.

I also had a personal cause to rejoice. I had made a conquest of the doctor's redoubtable reticence !

14th July 1945.

CHAPTER XIX

SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL DEPLORES SIMLA
CONFERENCE

HOW much I am possessed of the spirit of Robert Bruce can be judged by my attempts to meet and know Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The first time I went to see him soon after his release, he had gone to the doctor's. The second time he was about to go. The third time I tried to catch him at a public meeting, but there were forty thousand people between the Sardar and me.

However, at the fourth attempt, after his return from Simla, I made no mistake.

When I told him the history of my efforts to see him, he expressed his regret. The reason was writ large all over his face. For Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was then a very sick man. Jail life had taken heavy toll of his health—as it has of several other leaders and countless unnamed detainees.

This naturally led me to ask him if their treatment in jail was not all that could be desired. The idol of Congress crowds, reclining on his divan, shrugged his shoulders. We had no complaints exactly, he began and then humorously proceeded to give the reason why they had no complaints.

We asked for nothing and wanted nothing, so how could we have complaints! But there was one very vital complaint. Medical attendance was very poor. Apart from jail doctors, the leaders were not allowed to consult any doctor of their own. The same complaint has been made to me by several detainees, broken in health, who have been recently released. How much worse their suffering must have been!

It was a wonder how the leaders made the trip to Simla at all almost immediately after they had started breathing fresh air again. But the call of duty conquered their ailments. They had hardly any time to rest when they had to rush.



Vallabhbhai Patel — The Big Brain!

Gallantly they travelled to Simla in quest of a settlement for their country. Sincerely they believed that this time the British were in earnest about toeing out India from the stalemate that has settled over her as thick as the worst London fog.

Alas, they were deceived. Their sacrifice was in vain. Sardar Vallabhbhai said in despair the conference might as well not have been called if the British had the intention of giving the power of veto to any one party. The Congress went to the extent of submitting to the Viceroy's veto. But *when the Viceroy himself fell a victim to Jinnah's veto, there was nothing more to be said or done.*

The Sardar summoned his feeble strength to voice his resentment and annoyance against being called up all the way to Simla—just to be told that nothing could be achieved without Jinnah's agreement!

If the Viceroy were going to be helpless without Jinnah why didn't he ascertain his attitude beforehand and find out if the League leader were ready to co-operate with the Congress?

Surely the British knew from experience and evidence that Jinnah would not bend to any compromise or reason and if they had any hopes that he would do so this time, they should have consulted him first before convening the conference. And if they had none, they should have determined to carry on without him and his obstructionist—nay his destructivist—policy.

Wavell could have quite easily told Jinnah—Look here, Mr. Jinnah, thus far and no further. I request you to be reasonable. But if you are not, I go ahead. Wavell said nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he pampered Jinnah like a spoilt child and allowed the conference to be broken up on his account and as he desired.

What do you think was the object of the British in doing that, I wondered. Did they enforce the failure of the conference because the Tories felt assured of being returned to power? Was it an indication of approaching Tory victory, for we know that so long as the Tories continue in power, they will never want a settlement to be brought about in India.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel differed from this view. He felt that Labour were one with the Tories in this respect, that Labour had approved the action of the Viceroy in terminating the

conference as a failure.

Then, I concluded gloomily, Labour victory would make no difference in the British policy towards India? The leader, famous for his brilliant insight, shook his head. No difference at all. It will not be exactly like going from the frying-pan into the fire—but it will still be staying in the frying-pan!

If my presumption is not the reason for the breakdown of the conference, then what is, Sardar saheb?

"The usual object, I suppose," he replied, "to make the world believe that the British were trying their best to hand over the reins of Government to India—but the Indians simply will not hold them, that their political parties could not agree among themselves."

Happily the Congress has done enough this time to be completely absolved from any blame for the wreckage. If the Government were banking on the hope that the Congress would refuse to participate and negotiate, would refuse to take up ministers, they were much mistaken.

For Congress made every possible endeavour by way of compromise, persuasion and patience and in face of a violent cross fire from many of its own sympathisers for sacrificing so much of its prestige, to arrive at some understanding and subsequent settlement in the interest of the country.

When I mentioned to Vallabhbhai, why the Congress Working Committee had not insisted on the release of the detainees along with the leaders and made the same a condition of Congress participation in the conference, he told me that the Congress did not wish to give any bone whatever to the British to blame them for not showing an unqualified spirit of co-operation.

So, the Congress went even so far as letting its army rot in jail a while longer so that there should be no hitch in the chances of a settlement. What more could it have done?

At the time when it looked likely that Wavell would overrule Jinnah, the Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar had told me that the great danger of a well-organized body like the Congress taking up power for the first time is that it refuses to forget that it is a party instead of a *parens patrie*, that it is now the Government of the entire country and not a narrow, selfish organization.

But Dr. Jayakar had added that in other countries, this transformation had taken sometime to come about and it may be so in India. So he would be content if the Congress adheres to the excellent beginning it had made in its selections to the Cabinet. He would indeed regard it as a safe augury of future success.

Congress had indeed proved itself to be a *parens patrie*.

"The question of any difference between the Congress and the League does not arise at all," the Sardar pointed out, "in view of the fact that the Government itself did not agree with the League."

In his summing-up speech, the Viceroy himself did not suggest anything that the Congress should do or should have done. It proves that Congress conduct was impeccable.

I asked the Congress "chief of staff" what he thought Jinnah meant by saying that we would know who was responsible for the failure when the Azad-Wavell correspondence was released, after which he would make his statement.

The Sardar just laughed. He couldn't figure it out. Probably Jinnah, having published his own correspondence with His Excellency without the latter's knowledge, wanted to draw out the Congress and make it sail in the same boat as himself.

Of course, the Congress know better etiquette and would have none of it and would publish the correspondence only with the knowledge and acquiescence of the Viceroy. That was, however, all the reason that Vallabhbhai could attach to Jinnah's boast. As a matter of fact there was not even any mention of the League in the correspondence of the Congress President with Lord Wavell.

I was curious to know why the Viceroy had so unequivocally taken the blame of the failure on himself. Was there a catch in it? Was he counting on attracting world sympathy and appreciation for the British effort and spirit?

The Sardar took a more lenient view. He attributed the Viceroy's self-blame to his anxiety not to upset the atmosphere for another attempt.

So, another attempt was in the offing. The cat will soon be out of the bag. What sort of a "cat" will it be this time? I asked bitterly.

"Oh, I would not take such a pessimistic view of things," one of our national brains trust men cheered me up. *"It is impossible for the British to hold the country any more."*

"Why, Sardarji," I asked, "why do you say that when they held us during the worst times?"

"You mean during the war?" rejoined Mr. Vallabhbhai, "yes, but during the time, do not forget their administration has broken down miserably. *The present administration is no credit to them and it is going from bad to worse.*

On the other hand, the Congress organization has gained enormous strength and prestige in the meantime and the Government will be forced to remove some of the restrictions placed on the Congress as a result of which it will soon be functioning normally again."

We should know in the course of the next three or four weeks.

That is a very heartening prospect, I commented, but don't you think that the moment you start functioning normally again, they will clamp you all back in jail?

To this the Congress chief replied emphatically: *"The British Government cannot help giving us a free rein unless they want a conflict even bigger than of 1942."*

And what will be the nature of this free rein, when you have it? I enquired, meaning what would be the future Congress programme.

That I cannot say, replied Sardarji, at the moment we are collecting facts and figures from the provinces.

And after all, you must not forget that we are just out of jail—and hardly, yet, out of bed—and lying back wearily on his couch, he added a deft closing touch—as you can see.

28th July 1945.

CHAPTER XX

ACHARYA J. B. KRIPALANI EXPOSES THE BLACK
MARKET AND THE BLACKBALLING OF INDIA'S
FREEDOM

W AVELL is on his way again, Mr. Kripalani, do you see any hope? . . .

With this enquiry I greeted the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress almost immediately after the news that the Viceroy was summoned to England for a second time within six weeks.

We don't know what he has gone for or why he has been summoned, smiled the Congress Secretary. It is futile to speculate.

He lapsed into silence for a moment or two and in the time I was able to size up this organizing force of all Congress activities.

In the first place he had struck me by his utter simplicity and consideration before I had even met him. I had asked to see him but knowing that I had not been well for sometime, he wrote back in reply. "If you cannot come, I may come over to you." It is just one of those little things in life which even without knowing the person who is moreover a leader convinces you of his qualities of head and heart.

Next in order of attraction came Mr. Kripalani's "bobbed hair". Here was the first politician of note whom I had seen wearing long hair which, along with his lean, long face and his dreamy eyes, gave this ex-professor of politics and economics, a look of philosophical fatalism, altogether incompatible with his dynamic spirit of resistance.

The beard, however, has disappeared, the beard he wore when he first came out of jail and which became famous when in reply to the question, what he thought of Pakistan, he said, Can't you see I am wearing it on my chin? . . . Perhaps he has shaved it off now out of despair at Jinnah's attitude at the Simla Conference!



Kripalani

2/4/47

Kripalani, however, blames Jinnah only for allowing himself to be used as a scapegoat of British imperialism which in fact manoeuvred the failure of the Conference. He did not agree with the view that Wavell succumbed to Jinnah's veto. Not a bit of it. The Government wanted the veto and got it.

Where the British want to by-pass any leader or party, they never think twice. They just do it. They did it in the Punjab where they defied Jinnah. The Governor of the Punjab actually suggested that the people should rally round the successor of Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan. Again, at the ill-fated conference, the British quite conveniently overlooked the Hindu Mahasabha, caring a straw for the consequences which are reaping their harvest today.

The Acharya brushed aside my contention that it was perhaps Wavell's intention to expose Jinnah in the eyes of the world so that the way would be open to by-pass him the next time without raising an iota of indignation in his favour.

Nonsense, he said, warming up, if that were so, why did Wavell take the blame for the failure upon himself? It was purely in order to protect his Government and the League which is a part if not parcel of the British policy. Again, if Wavell was sincere about it, he could have taken the vote of the Conference instead of just blindly listening to Jinnah's demand and pretending to yield to it.

Oh no, my young friend, said the Acharya, shaking his experienced head with a sad smile, it was not Jinnah's doing that wrecked the conference. It was the British policy of not parting with power which did it.

In future, they may do the same thing. They may call conference after conference and instigate one man, one party to break it up. Next time it may be Ambedkar or even the European delegate who may take Jinnah's place.

In other words, just as in clubs and societies, an applicant for membership is blackballed by the dissenting vote of just one or two committee members, so with India's freedom. But while in the clubs, blackballing is voluntary, here it is inspired. Admission to self-government is denied because one man's protest is allowed to be made the plea for denying India its birthright.

* * *

Don't you see any hope in the Labour Government and their promises? I asked, trying to shake the Acharya out of his gloom. What hope, what promises? he retorted. None of the Labour Ministers have shown any indication of liquidating the Indian Empire. They are not relinquishing their hold even on Hongkong which belongs to their allies, the Chinese.

How could they? Social security and the maintenance of living standard in England brought them into power and in order to maintain them, they must have export trade which India can help to flourish. If they did not have India to rely on, how would Britain compete with America and Russia? It is only by using her political power that she can do so.

What Stafford Cripps has said is significant. He is the Labour Government's expert on India. He does not want any interim government. He is talking of a permanent arrangement. When it is not possible to arrive at any temporary agreement, the Acharya asked in exasperation, how on earth does he hope to reach any permanent settlement? The 1937 Constitution took a dozen years to shape itself. The Constitution of India may well take many dozens of such years.

Then I suppose it means, I said, that the present state of affairs must continue.

Don't suppose, came the prompt rejoinder. He assured me that it will, if the power that he can help it.

But I had a hope still flickering in my mind which got the better of Mr. Kripalani's assurance. The war has come to a total and victorious end for the Allies. Will not the other Allied powers intervene on our behalf? Wouldn't America take up cudgels for us?

Mr. Kripalani looked almost sorry for throwing a wet sponge over my enthusiasm. But facts had to be faced.

America! he reflected, with a hopeless shrug of his shoulders, America had to look after her own interests—of economically exploiting the Pacific and China. If she wanted a free hand there, she must allow the same latitude to Britain in India. Moreover the Americans want to be defended from the threat of Russia, and England alone can guard the Atlantic—which is no more an ocean but just a lake!

I had nowhere else to turn for any further hope. I fell back on the elections. But in them, even I did not see any salvation and wondered what was the object of holding them, as I was always in the habit of associating elections with only those countries which had their own government.

The Congress Secretary agreed but said that the Congress, however, was always ready for fresh elections, though the only purpose it would serve under the circumstances would be to indicate what party was most popular in the country. He added that there would be some sense in holding the elections if provincial autonomy under proper conditions were re-introduced before they were held.

What does the Congress mean to do in the indefinite "meantime"? I enquired, meaning whether Congress hoped to sit with folded hands and do nothing for the country or set about some constructive programme in the best way it could. Only an organisation of your calibre, I told the Congress Secretary, could bring any relief to the countless sufferings of the countless villagers.

Yes, that is true, said this leader of the national organisation. Gandhiji's economic and social programme is already before the country. It includes as its principal item the development of villages. I have seen the programme, I told its advocate. I had heard it from the lips of Gandhiji himself. I knew it was very workable. But what I wanted to know now was if anybody were working on it to carry it to its successful conclusion.

The Acharya explained that at present the Congress had to rely only on voluntary organisations to carry out the programme.

Without a National Government, it was impossible to command the necessary men, material and money. Village work can only be pushed through quickly by a national government which would be able to supply the funds and protect the villages socially and economically.

At present, there was nothing at all to check the overwhelming encroachment of the larger industries on the smaller ones. So village uplift work can only be done in a small way now and that is being done. However, much in this direction can yet be done by voluntary effort if the nation listened to Gandhiji. For instance, there need have been no cloth famine if Gandhiji had been heard.

Now with the war over, the British will again start dumping consumer goods on us. The process has already begun. Unless people are vigilant, we shall not be able to resist this inflow of foreign goods.

Only a national government can completely stop consumer goods from consuming our own indigenous industries. But something can be done by our passing a self-denying ordinance that under no circumstances shall we allow the pouring in of consumer goods. We must strengthen the Swadeshi movement built on the basis of cottage and village industries.

Normality, Kripalani feels, must be brought about as soon as possible in the economic field. The war-time controls must go, I attempted to contend that it would not be possible nor advisable to lift the various controls at once for the reason that just as Rome was not built in a day, peace conditions could not be set up in a day either, after six years of abnormal disruption.

The Congress Secretary did not agree. It would be possible to remove the controls if British and American troops were cleared from our shores at once. Many of the controls were imposed in order to serve their needs, and now they were no longer needed. They should be packed off by the ample transports released from war duty.

But wouldn't the sudden lifting of the controls cause an even more exceptional rise in the prices and make an already unbearable black market a *pitch* black market?

Not at all, Kripalani thought. On the contrary the merchants would come out with all their stored up stuff and be anxious to sell it off, for even though there may not be any immediate inflow of fresh goods, the businessman always looks to the future and dreads the possibility of having his existing goods left on his hands. So, he would do his best to sell them off and thus the price would come down.

Black market would flourish, said the Acharya, so long as the controls stayed. And then he startled me by saying that *you really cannot blame the black marketeers.*

Cannot blame them, Kripalanji! I exclaimed, bewildered. Why, Pandit Jawaharlal himself has said that though he hates to hurt a fly, it would give him great pleasure to hang the profiteers by the neck till they were dead.

I do not agree, began the ex-professor, in a spirited defence of his point of view. Supposing you had a shop and sold whatever little stuff you had at reasonable prices, all your stock would be exhausted within a few hours, as a result of which you would be left stranded without any goods and would have to close down your shop. Would you do it?

I would do it if I were assured of my quota.

Exactly, smiled the Congress Secretary who seemed to be professor, politician, businessman, all rolled into one. Exactly, he repeated slowly, if you were assured of your quota.

Then he snapped: But you never were. You were at the mercy of Government and so you had no alternative, if you wanted to keep your business going, to sell your limited stocks as slowly as possible which you could do only by selling at prohibited prices. The difficulty could be solved only if all the economic forces were worked by an impartial Government. Black market is a social problem. Individuals cannot solve it. They can only mitigate the trouble to some slight extent. Do you get me?

I got it to the limit of attesting "Q. E. D." to his arguments, unethical perhaps, but certainly realistic and logical.

Mr. Kripalani, however, agreed that a few of these profiteers should have been hanged, but Government could not very well do it because it would have to risk its own neck first and foremost. Government itself had resorted to the black market.

It often purchased goods by paying higher prices than it had fixed. The provincial and central governments made large profits by selling to the public much above the price they had purchased at. Bengal and Sind made large profits in grain and Sind wiped off its huge Barrage debt that way.

*

*

*

Finally, I asked the Congress Secretary-in-Chief, that since in one of his speeches, he had applauded the spirit of the August disturbances, would he encourage a recurrence of them as a measure of desperation?

Quickly losing the philosophic calm which I had originally but mistakenly associated with him, the Acharya aggressively contended that the Congress had taken a vow of non-violence

because they believed Swaraj could be achieved by it soon and because the principles of humanity could be served by it, *but they had not taken that vow to perpetuate Imperialism.* We would much rather have violence than cowardice if it came to grips with British aggression.

But surely not violence on yourself, I asked incredulously, violence on your own buildings and post offices, on your trams and buses, on your own people, on your own person.

No, certainly not, rejoined the Acharya, I do not approve the acts of violence committed by our people—it was playing into the British hands. They wanted it, so that they might have an opportunity of putting them down by terrorist methods and thus cow down the people.

They could have done it quite peaceably by releasing us, he added, a word from us would have been enough. He admits that what the people did was wrong but *the spirit which actuated it was certainly praiseworthy. It showed that they had guts and would no longer kneel meekly to repression. They remained for a time undaunted.*

But taking the worst view, when people indulged in violence, they acted against Gandhiji, the Congress and the country. If anybody has a right to complain and condemn it, *we* have that right and not the British Government for whom the excited outburst of the people was merely a plea for unprecedented terrorism.

And then how can a government which is thoroughly saturated with violence and which encouraged sabotage in territories occupied by Germany and Norway protest if people copy their methods? It is the pot calling the kettle black.

* * *

What about the people of the States, Mr. Kripalani. They inhabit two-fifths of the country's area in some five hundred and odd States. No one seems to bother about the States at all in the consideration of the Indian question. What will be their position?

The Congress Secretary was immediately cautious. The States question, he said, is intimately linked up with the question of Indian independence. When the latter comes, the

States will have the choice of remaining affiliated to the British or be associated with the National Government, and it is easy to guess which side they will pick.

In that case, I blurted out, will they be merged in the Indian nation or allowed to carry on as they are with their Highnesses and various species of princelings.

This was the climax. It was too delicate. The Acharya stiffened. He did not vouchsafe a reply. As we shook hands, I concluded that our numerous Maharajas and Maharanis were not likely to abandon their titles with as much alacrity as the members of the Hindu Mahasabha's Working Committee have just done.

25th August 1945.

CHAPTER XXI

SARAT CHANDRA BOSE, THE MAN AND HIS VIEWS

TILL I met Sarat Chandra Bose, I had no idea India also had a Churchill of its own—to match the Churchill of Britain. The same set expression, the same grim purpose, the same unquenchable spirit never to submit or yield—even the same cigar!

But above all, that same bull-dog determination reminiscent of Churchill's words during the crisis of his country—"we shall fight in the hills, we shall fight in the streets", etc.,—indeed as much determination to win the freedom of India as Churchill had, and although dethroned, still has, not to let her.

There is no milk-sop stuff about Sarat Babu. The first few words with him will tell you that quite plainly. It does not mean he indulges in browbeating, but at the same time there is no beating about the bush.



Sarat Bose — So you think you are the only man in the world
for your inevitable cigar day.

Unlike some leaders, however, he is utterly devoid of all airs. He has a charming off-hand affability and till he is aroused, you would never suspect that he has the characteristic Bengali revolutionary spirit burning in him.

He is not only a politician. He is also an intellectual. The two qualities are seldom to be found together in one man. But there is an ideal combination of them in Sarat Chandra Bose. Professing to be little read, he quotes profusely and reels off one authority after another on whatever subject he is talking about.

When I told him I would be proud to be so "little read" as he claimed, he commented that his years in jail—he was not yet two weeks old in freedom then—had done him at least one good turn. It had given him time to read, to make notes—and to learn to type, though the amusing part about his last-mentioned enterprise was that at times he was stumped by what he himself had typed and could not read!

"I have started my life afresh", the fifty-six-year-old idol of Bengal said brightly, without a trace of the bitterness or brooding I have found in several other leaders, recently released. He now knew so much more *about* so much more.

I asked him if he were free to read anything and everything. Oh no, he smiled, the British Government tried their best to educate me and reform me while they had a chance! But they never got anywhere, naturally.

Once Sarat Babu wrote to the authorities: "I am fifty-six years old. If by this age I have not formed my opinions, I am not going to form them now—and if I have, I am not going to change them". Since that day they gave him up as a hopeless case!

Though the sight of the suffering he has seen has cut him to the quick, though the suffering he has borne has broken his health, not only his spirit, but even his sense of humour have remained intact.

Get him to talk about his jail experiences, and he will tell you about the jail cook who had taken very kindly and even affectionately to him. So, when the time came for Mr. Bose to leave jail, he said persuasively to him, "Please do not fight with the British again, Sahib!"

No leader had talked so much and made so many speeches

and expressed his views so freely as Sarat Chandra Babu within so short a time of his release. They have always pleaded for time,—that they were just out, that they have had no time to study the situation and direct the course of their policy.

No such excuses from Sarat Babu. He has been going hammer and tongs at whoever deserve them in his opinion from the moment of his release. In the broader issues as in the narrower ones his ideas are clear-cut and substantiated by eminent authorities.

He believes in Wendell Wilkie's "One World" theory and deplores that the methods and sympathies for its creation are all absent today.

He enjoys George Bernard Shaw's exposure of Anglo-American fascism as pitched against Italo-German fascism.

He felt quite hopeless after San Francisco which was a repetition of the same old story of imperialism.

He deplored the fact that at San Francisco, the voice of China was not raised in favour of subject nations.

He saw the necessity of a strong Asiatic Federation to bring freedom to the subject nations.

He felt assured that all the present party feeling would be transformed into one of unity if India became free.

And like an encaged lion he raged against the British leopard which had dug its claws deep into the body of India.

*

*

*

This is the spirit of Sarat Chandra Bose. When I asked him how he had derived it, he replied promptly : by eating meat! Young Indians must eat plenty of meat. He debunked the vegetarians who were "softies" and thought that India's manhood to be built up powerfully both in body and mind, in spirit and will, must eat meat. . . .

And also smoke cigars? I asked humorously, for with Sarat Babu a huge long cigar is so constant a companion that to see him without one would be to feel something missing in him.

This is Sarat Chandra Bose, the man and his views in a nutshell. In the next chapter, we shall see what is inside the "shell" in greater detail.

CHAPTER XXII

SARAT BOSE CONDEMNS IMPERIALISM,
WAVELLISM AND CHIANG KAI-SHEK

I POINTED out in the previous chapter in dealing with Sarat Chandra Bose, the man, that till he was aroused you would never suspect that he has the characteristic Bengali revolutionary spirit burning within him.

In this chapter I have deliberately held up various political "red rags" in front of him in order to arouse him to attack!

He scores a political "bull's eye" with everything he aims at, whether it be the philosophy of Fascism or its synonymity with Imperialism, whether it be the British trick of the trade or Chiang Kai-shek's duplicity, whether it be the fiasco of Pakistan or the farce of Indian Communism. . . .

All this—and much more—within barely ten days of his release, after four long years of illegal incarceration. It is surely sufficient to make the hearts of his enemies sink into their shoes—for if this is just the beginning of the onslaught on them, what must indeed be the shape of things to come!

Though just out of jail, Sarat Chandra does not plead for rest. He is back in the harness of his country's service the moment he is free, although his health cries piteously for consideration and his broken constitution demands some haven of peace and quiet.

But there is only one haven for the restless spirit of Sarat Chandra—Freedom for his country. Till then, no other. Till then no rest. Till then, no "Cease Fire" on those that obstruct the way to it.

Go-bang is his policy. Match Imperialism with Imperialism. Fight Fascism with Fascism. Even as the war has just proved. All warring countries were Fascists under different labels—the one Anglo-American, the other Italo-German. The difference without a difference!

He had no less a man than George Bernard Shaw to agree

with him. For in his latest book *Everybody's Political What's What?* G. B. S. says when dealing with "the great corruption of Socialism which threatens us at present", that it calls itself Fascism in Italy, National Socialism (Nazi, for short) in Germany, New Deal in the United States—and is clever enough to remain nameless in England—but everywhere it means the same thing.

Quoting further from the book, Mr. Bose expressed his complete agreement with the view that it produced a world war in which Anglo-American Fascism fights German and Italian Fascism because Fascism is international, while the capitalists are still intensely national.

For when Germany proposes to *fashify* (only G. B. S. can think of such a word!) the whole earth under the Fuehrership of Adolf Hitler and Italy the same under Benito Mussolini, the Anglo-American Fascists will see Germany and Italy damned before they accept any Fascism that is not of their own making under their own Fuehrers.

As it is, G. B. S. adds, the Western Fascists are combining with Russia to destroy the central and mid-southern Fascists and with Communist China to defeat capitalist Japan.

The sum and substance of his argument, Sarat Chandra said, turning over a few more pages of the *Political What's What*, the great Shaw puts in a superb nutshell—this policy, he writes, called Fascism in Italy, National Socialism or Nazidom in Germany, is in growing and vigorous practice in England and the so-called Western democracies, where it is left unnamed.

Yes, reflected Sarat Chandra, closing the book, there is a wealth of wisdom and insight in what Shaw says. It was a pity, he thought, that some of our Congress leaders did not give the same interpretation to history between the years 1939 and 1945. The interpretation they gave was entirely wrong and misleading. It was more or less the British old school-tie interpretation! It was an internationalism of a sort, cheap, if not false.

For Sarat Chandra makes no difference whatever between Imperialism and Fascism. To what the late Romain Rolland said somewhere that Fascism is the blood-brother of Imperialism, the blood-brother of Subhas Bose would add, that it is the younger brother. The so-called democracies of today are empires,

possibly some people would like to describe them as *vampires*.

Sarat Babu openly confessed his inability to understand how people who have declared their willingness to fight the Fascists could consistently at the same time declare their willingness to side with the Imperialists.

So, according to my reading of Sarat Chandra's theory, we are living in a world of Fascism and the wars we are fighting or, lest Sarat Babu protests, I had better say, the wars that are being fought—are wars that are nothing more than civil wars. India is, of course, not a part of this pernicious world federation of Fascists.

Armed with that clue, I tried to place this death-dealer to the Fascist in what I thought would be a tight corner. I meant to ask him: you have declared you are not in favour of having any truck with the Japs, then how do you associate yourself with brother Subhas' attitude?

But I didn't get that far when I started speaking. He nipped me in the bud. He said he had no material on which he could pass judgment. He had merely said he had no truck with the Japs and added that whether it would be wise to make any alliance with any power, Eastern or Western, if any such offer was made in the near or distant future, was a matter on which no opinion could be expressed now.

For Sarat Chandra firmly believes that every nation in the world which has fought for independence in the past had fought with a certain amount of foreign help. It does not apply only to subject countries. Even independent nations have taken help of foreign powers whose ideologies are completely different.

The very war which has just terminated can come to the witness-box and give evidence. Even a mighty nation like Russia sought the help of Britain and America. Moreover, nations are becoming more and more inter-dependent on one another.

Am I to conclude from this, Mr. Bose, I asked with some misgiving, that India can never gain her freedom without foreign assistance?

The leader's faith and pride in his country's patriotic potential stepped into the gap which had made room for my question. No, I do not say that, he denied emphatically, with a Churchillian puff at his cigar which I was beginning to notice was as

inevitable in his mouth as it is in the ex-British premier's.

I verily believe, he added, that India can acquire her independence without outside help but I shall not be surprised if in the course of the next struggle, world forces will line up with her and give her moral and material help.

Sarat Chandra Bose, outspoken and fearless, a realist and not a theorist, a believer in mass power and not in power politics, warmed up to an exhilarating pitch of frankness as he said, "I am not hypocritical enough to say that I can be the friend of Britain or for that matter of any country till the one concedes India her freedom and the other helps her in her fight to acquire it."

What is the best way to set about it then, Sarat Babu? I enquired. Do you see any help in the latest Wavell proposals or the promises of the Labour Government?

This was an invitation to revolt! For Sarat Babu nearly jumped down my throat. The very idea of looking up to the Wavell proposals is revolting and humiliating!

It was nothing short of a piece of showmanship on the part of the British.

He did not annihilate the Labour Government as mercilessly. I am free to confess, he said, that there are some good men in the rank and file of the Labour Party, but as far as leaders of that party are concerned, I have little or no confidence in them.

He does not know if he will be in a position to revise his views at some future date, but at present it seems that the ruling cliques in Great Britain have always been and still are practically the same in so far as their attitude towards India is concerned, whether they are Liberal, Conservative or Labour. *They are all rank Imperialists!*

Thus relentless in his realism, he relented in his grim tone: we'll have to wait for sometime before we can ascertain the attitude from abroad. Till then, our duty is to intensify the struggle for Indian independence and for that purpose to make the Congress a more militant and fighting organisation than it ever was.

The Congress will not have to fight only against the British will it, Sir? I asked. What about the Pakistanis and the Com-

munists, the "indigenous" obstructionists in the path to freedom?

*

*

*

Pakistan, Sarat Chandra believes and hundreds of thousands believe with him, is not practical politics. Mr. Jinnah's Muslim nation theory is entirely unfounded in fact.

Even the founder of the Pakistan movement, Choudary Rahmat Ali, did not talk of a Muslim nation. In a recent booklet which the "founder" wrote and sent to Mr. Bose as a God-sent election campaign gift (!) he pleads for the scrapping of the All-India Muslim League as such and creating instead an alliance of the three nations of Pakistan, Bengal and Usmanistan.

In the same precious publication, the author says in another place, "we will build on the solid and secure foundations of Pakistan, Bengal and Usmanistan, three independent nations!"

In yet another and later booklet of his, Rahmat Ali has suggested the creation of certain other "stans" such as Siddiquistan, Munistan (presumably after Hitler's Munich!), Maplistan, Safistan, and Nasaristan. Our hats off to this prolific inventor of "stans"!

So this is Pakistan, Taleyarkhan! exclaimed its "public prosecutor", with a shrug of hopelessness born of amusement. It does not surprise me at all, he added, that Muslim leaders like the late Sir Mohamed Iqbal, Jinnah, Zaffrullah Khan, Yusuf Ali, S. S. Suhrawardy, and others not so long ago described the Pakistan scheme as a mere chimera or in words to that effect. And it doesn't surprise me at all, he concluded, that Mr. Jinnah should fight shy of defining Pakistan.

Anyway, Mr. Bose should be hugely indebted to Mr. Rahmat Ali, the founder of Pakistan and the inventor of the various Stans for providing him with a most handy weapon for his forthcoming election campaign in Bengal!

So much for Pakistan and its scheme—or rather *schism*. The Communists were still to be explained away.

*

*

*

In deploring the fact that Indian Communists have done nothing to emulate the great Chinese Communist leader, Mau Tse Tung, Sarat Babu surprised me with a hidden machine-gun

nest which he started firing with relentless accuracy into the heart of Chiang Kai-shek's history.

We, Indians have always had a great and sincere sympathy for the Chinese people, he said, in their struggle against the Japs, even though it may not have been within our power to render any material help except to send a medical mission. It was sent by the Congress but the full credit for the idea and the insistence on its execution must go to Subhas Bose, President of the Haripura Congress.

Sarat Chandra's tone changed from sympathy to severity. It is one thing, he began, to express sympathy for the Chinese people. It is an *entirely* different matter to lionize a man like Chiang Kai-shek.

But he is the national hero of China, I blurted out, in bewilderment and, as it transpired, in ignorance.

Hero, my foot! retorted this past master of "instantaneous exposure", his Bengali blood warming up red-hot in his veins. That is what the world is given to believe. If only it knew the facts, it would not have a shred of respect for the man. And thereupon Sarat Chandra, emulating Emile Zola in his great *J'accuse*, embarked upon an unprecedented indictment at the end of which all the glamour of gallantry attached to the Generalissimo lay prostrated at his feet.

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, the "great humanitarian", for indulging in numerous blood-baths in China "with the sanctification of foreign powers and the financial help of foreign capitalists."

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, "one of the Big Four", for pursuing a pro-Japanese policy from 1931 to 1936, in defiance of the large and growing volume of public opinion in his own country.

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, the "saviour of his people", for striking down mercilessly millions of his countrymen, men, women and children, for opposing his declared policy of no-war and non-resistance against the Japs.

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, "the terror of the Japs", for giving the Japs Manchuria, Jehol, Chahar, the Tangku Truce, the Ho-Numetzu Agreement and the Hopi-Chahar Council, without asking for a single copper or firing a single shot.

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, "the great patriot", for acquiescing, in the garrisoning of North China by Japanese troops with the American and British fleets, gunboats and armed forces standing by to co-operate if need be with the Japs in restoring law and order.

I ACCUSE Chiang Kai-shek, "the great Marshal of China", for directing and conducting as many as six extermination campaigns against his own people, their only crime being that they wanted him to lead the country against Japan which was pursuing her aggression into China in those years, namely, 1931 to 1936.

* * *

The terrific tirade to which I had listened with startled attention and abated breath, ended. The defence of "Dreyfus" began, the "Dreyfus" in this case being the Communist leader Mau Tse Tung.

But for Mau Tse Tung, Chiang Kai-shek would never have fought the Japs. The whole credit of coercing the Generalissimo into fighting Japan goes to Mau, Chutech, Chuenlai and other leaders of the Chinese Communists whom Chiang described and still describes as the Red Bandits.

I was not prepared for this appraisal of the Communists. Mimicking the style of the unspoilt darling of Bengal as best I could I said: It is one thing, Sir, to condemn Marshal Chiang Kai-shek. It is quite another to think so highly of the Communists.

I am proud, came the prompt rejoinder, to think highly of the Communists who put their country before their Communism. Listen, Sarat Chandra commanded me, to what Mau Tse Tung said during the fateful years: "For a people deprived of its national freedom, the revolutionary task is not immediate socialism but the struggle for independence. We cannot even discuss Communism if we are robbed of a country in which to practise it."

Noble words these! Don't you agree? he asked. They never strike our home-made Communists over here. Of them, if I had a good opinion, Taleyarkhan, you would have been justified in thinking ill of me. But I haven't. They merely try

to mislead the country by false slogans and by defaming Congress leaders and workers.

I could only say at the end of this remarkable trial and conviction of Chiang Kai-shek on the one hand and exoneration of Mau Tse Tung on the other, that it was strange so little should be known about so much good and evil.

It was sad, commented Sarat Chandra Bose in summing up, that our internationalists never gave us the real and true picture of China during the days of our struggle and never mentioned one word about the great man and his heroic band of workers, but followed the British old school tie in lionizing another who exterminated millions of his countrymen, who executed hundreds of leftist writers, who put Madame Sun-Yat-Sen in prison where probably she is still kept and—to sum up, who denied his country the smallest freedom.

And so my long talk with India's "lost-and-found" leader concluded. It was sensational because Sarat Chandra Bose did not mince matters, he did not indulge in platitudes, he did not believe in compromise, he threw caution to the winds and with characteristic courage called a spade a spade and debunked the world of make-believe in which we are living.

Bengal's beacon-light, his attitude was the embodiment of its spirit, that spirit of fighting free people full of such burning patriotism that they are devoured by the very flames which give them life—as was her greatest son and his great brother, Subhas Chandra Bose.

29th September 1945.

CHAPTER XXIII

M. Y. NURIE WONDERS—WHITHER JINNAH?

JINNAH the Leaguer stands condemned in the eyes of Nurie the Nationalist. Both are leaders. Both are Muslims. Both claim to be devoted to the cause of their country and their community. Yet what an ocean of difference between the two!

Jinnah stands for a divided India. Nurie for a united India. Jinnah's approach to the Hindu-Muslim problem is calculated to fan the flames of embitterness, distrust and suspicion between the two communities. Nurie seems to find a solution through the door of co-operation and goodwill instead of constant allegation and abuse.

All the time that Nurie talked to me he seemed to be asking, "Whither Jinnah?" I have heard much indignation expressed against the attitude of Mr. Jinnah, but never had I heard him indicted so severely as he was by Nurie, that is, not by a Hindu communalist, not by a Hindu Congressman, not by a Mahasabhaite, but by a Muslim himself—an ardent but a right-thinking and far-seeing Muslim who because he has the interests of his community at heart bleeds to see them sacrificed on the altar of Mr. Jinnah's policy.

Mr. Jinnah is leading the Muslims up a dangerous precipice—was the sum and substance of Mr. Nurie's protracted talk with me. He has been playing havoc on the sentiment of the ignorant and illiterate masses of Muslims indeed to such an extent that the many educated Muslims who do not agree with him and who are not Leaguers do not dare to raise their voice against him out of fear of upsetting the legend of Muslim solidarity which Jinnah has built up.

I wondered how he came by all this power and why it was not nipped in the bud. Nurie blamed the Congress policy of appeasement. At first the Congress, thinking that Jinnah was out to make common cause with them, encouraged him by giving in to his various demands. In course of time, they became so accustomed to conceding more and more to Jinnah, that Jinnah was able to impress on the Muslim mind that he was the one man who could get anything out of the Hindus for the Muslims. And so the Jinnah legend grew till it is today a disconcerting reality.

Had the Congress seen through the game he was trying to play, had they told him at the right time—"Thus far, Mr. Jinnah, and no further"—Jinnah would not have developed into such a dangerous power.

Mr. Nurie showed me how cleverly Jinnah had worked on the idea that the Hindus wanted the independence of India and

not the Muslims and so they would pay any price he demanded of them to secure the freedom of the country. All he had to do was to blockade the path to nationalist aspirations, sit tight there and not budge an inch till the Congress yielded to his demands. Then he would let the credulous Congress advance a few steps and again impose his blockade with a fresh demand and so on, he would carry on raising his price.

Today Jinnah is so drunk with power that he says the most incredible and irresponsible things and gets away with them. If he is challenged, he does not argue, he abuses. And with a man who abuses there is no argument.

But Mr. Nurie uttered a grave warning to Muslims all over India that unless they wake up to the issues in time and use their own judgment, they will be a lost community. After all the Muslims have to live with the Hindus and life would be hell for them, if they were to live it in a constant state of enmity and embitterness with their sister community.

Jinnah's reward for the Congress leniency towards him all these years has been to switch over the scorchlight of Muslim wrath from the British to the Hindus. He has been using the Congress as a tool for meeting his demands.

Instead of making these demands to the British, whom he does not wish to offend, he makes them to the Congress and being pampered by their anxiety to settle with him at almost all costs, gets almost anything out of them. He leaves the Congress to get into the bad books of Government by their fight for and demand of independence. He stands well aloof from the national struggle, smugly satisfied with what he is extracting from the Congress by doses.

Congress made a grave mistake, Mr. Nurie thinks, in not accepting the Cripps' offer. It gave Mr. Jinnah a reason to reject it too—just what he wanted. For he knew well that if the Congress accepted the offer, it would mean an end to his tactics of extracting pounds of flesh from them.

Not only for that reason but even for another the Congress would have been justified in availing the country of the opportunity. In 1942, few thought that the Allies would survive. So greater was the reason for them, Nurie argued, to accept it, because a country fully absorbed in the anxiety of recovering from

THEY TOLD ME SO

its precarious position, was hardly likely to pay much attention to what was happening six thousand miles away and we would have been able to interpret our powers as conferred on us by the Cripps scheme much the way we liked.

It was the Congress opportunity. And they missed it. It was Jinnah's anxious moment. And he survived it. What, however, Congress rejected in 1942, they accepted in 1945. But it was too late. Jinnah was in a position to dictate the no-settlement policy he has been advocating all the time but which uptil now, he was not able to endorse.

Even if Jinnah had been given all the five Muslim seats in the Council, he would have still torpedoed the Simla Conference by putting another hitch in the way because he knew that even with his full five, he would not be able to command a majority since the five seats allotted to other than Congress and League representatives would not vote with the League.

This is borne out by the little known fact that Maulana Azad had actually gone to the extent of offering Jinnah the opportunity of selecting all the five Muslim representatives—with the only very reasonable condition that one of them should be a non-Muslim Leaguer, who, however, the Maulana took the full responsibility to see, would not vote with the Congress.

What extremity of compromise on the part of the Congress! Yet even this, Mr. Jinnah turned down. Is any further proof required of his premeditated intention to break down the Conference? The British did not mind it of course because it gave them an opportunity to tell the world—we are willing to give self-government, but the Indians cannot agree among themselves to take it.

But Jinnah does not know what he is heading for. If he were heading for it alone, nobody would care, laughed Mr. Nurie, but he is dragging the unwary masses of the Muslim community with him.

His determination on division spells nothing but disaster for the Muslims. For the division that Mr. Jinnah wants will divide first and foremost the Muslims themselves. Their own solidarity and union would be rudely shaken and torn out of its roots. The crores of Muslims who would be able to maintain their own if they stood together will be weakened by division into three

groups of three crores each, all of them completely cut off from each other.

Mr. Nurie described Jinnah's claim to get together six crores of Muslims in the east and west zones as fantastic and physically incompatible under his own scheme. Heaven alone knows how he contemplates striding across the breadth of India and uniting the three crores of the one zone with the three crores of the other!

The Quaid-i-Azam has already committed the blunder of insisting on separate electorate, deplored Mr. Nurie, and now he is evidently going to add to his total of blunders by insisting on the division. Under the system of separate electorate the scope of the Muslims has been considerably cut down, as no other than Muslims would vote for Muslims. Under a joint electorate the chances of the Muslims were much greater, as many non-Muslim voters would vote for Muslim candidates.

The funniest part, Mr. Nurie thought, of Jinnah's Pakistan was the fact that the demand came for it only from the provinces where the Muslims are in a minority! With the exception of Sind, none of the assemblies in the majority provinces passed the resolution demanding Pakistan.

Mr. Jinnah's nervousness about these provinces is proved by the fact that he is conducting vehement campaigns against Congress there at present.

One might ask why against the Congress in provinces where the Congress are in a minority, and wield no influence.

And Mr. Nurie would answer, don't you see, my dear friend, Mr. Jinnah is trying to cover up his diffidence in his own Muslim groups by assailing the Congress. In fact he is fighting in these provinces against these various groups of Muslims and not the Congress because he has nothing to fear from the Congress there.

For instance, in the Punjab, the key of Pakistan, he is pitted against the powerful Unionist party which is composed of all communities and hold the rural areas very strongly.

Mr. Jinnah's "order of the day" to the Muslim population of these provinces appears to be—Because I want Pakistan; therefore you shall accept it. It doesn't matter at all whether

THEY TOLD ME SO

you like it or not. And this Mr. Jinnah does, not by telling them in so many words but by doping them with the fear that Hindus are out to crush the Muslims and that they must be on their guard and have nothing to do with them. And the poor people believe him.

Little do they realise, Mr. Nurie added, that this fear complex is the precursor of all defeats. It was fear of the German army that led the British to flee helter-skelter from France in 1940. It was the fear of the British fleet that kept Germany from invading England after Dunkirk and so on.

There is still much more to say, we've been wandering from subject to subject, said the ex-Congress Minister, the nationalist Muslim who is not in "League" with Jinnah. But before he could annihilate Jinnah any more, I rose to leave anxious to record this thirty-minute exposure of the League leader's policy, before it escaped my memory.

Before I left, I saw a photo of Mr. Nurie as he was in 1937. I remarked, you looked much better then, Mr. Nurie. Don't forget, my friend, I lost forty pounds in jail, he said, and then added quickly, but that didn't help me to get out of the jail—as Mr. Jinnah may think. On the contrary it helped me to feel fitter!

27th October 1945.

CHAPTER XXIV

BHULABHAI DESAI EXTOLS AZAD HIND HAVOC

THE epic enacted in the Red Fort is over at last. The people are transported with joy at the news that their heroes, the victims of the first I.N.A. Trial, are after all not to be transported.

The symbols of the Indian National Army, Shah Nawaz, Sehgal and Dhillon have become the darlings of the people.



Bhulabhai Desai — The Nose for INA News

Not only that. They have also become the harbingers of unity by the very nature of their "composition"—a Muslim, a Hindu, a Sikh—all standing stoutly for one India, all fighting fiercely for one Freedom.

That was the first thing Mr. Bhulabhai Desai pointed out to me when I went to pay him my tribute on his supreme success. The people have not forgotten him. They have not overlooked him. If the I.N.A. men have become heroes in their eyes, Bhulabhai Desai has become the great defender of their faith. If they have lavished affection on the one, they have bestowed admiration on the other and they have not lagged behind in giving energetic expression to it.)

The brilliance, nay the genius, of his defence glorified the cause of the Indian National Army. It vindicated its motives, born of passionate patriotism, and revealed the great hardships and greater sacrifices its men cheerfully endured, so that their motherland may be free.

The country was aroused by these revelations. Hitherto she had known so little about the activities and deeds of the national army. Bhulabhai brought it much closer to her heart. Mere sympathisers became passionate devotees of the Azad Hind Fauj. Sceptics no longer doubted. Critics were silenced. They admitted there was more to it than met the eye. Government was warned. Thus far and no further.

A special ordinance was passed in a hurry, making the Commander-in-Chief the confirming authority of any sentence which, in order to preserve the last vestige of British prestige, the Court Martial may impose on the accused. The ordinance liberated the men—and saved the British from another "spot of bother." If Bhulabhai is the Defender of the Faith, then Auchinleck has shown himself the Upholder of Discretion.

I wanted Bhulabhai to elaborate on the defence he conducted. But he would have none of himself. That is not going to help you, he said. What your readers should know, he added, is not *my* work, but the work of the I.N.A. in its heyday and the *real* quality of its gallant men. So little is known as yet about either. You will be surprised.

I was surprised, baffled, amazed, all in one, as the great lawyer conveyed to me his impressions of the men he defended and described the work of the organization and its founder and leader to which they had dedicated their lives.

Mr. Bhulabhai was most struck by their overflowing faith in the leadership of Netaji Subhas Babu. They were convinced beyond the shade of a doubt that he meant to fight for India's freedom at all costs and only for India's freedom. He had no other aim and no other motive. He lived for it and worked for it alone and would have fought for it against anybody who obstructed the way to it, even against the Japs had it been necessary. He had nothing further from his mind than to force out one aggressor only to let in another—a much worse one.

He went over to the Japs only to help free India, not to fetter her afresh. If they had been ruling India, he would have gone over to the British or to anybody to seek aid against them. Any idea of thralldom to any power in the world was utterly alien and repulsive to him.

So it may be safely assumed that Subhas Babu collaborated with the Japs on the express understanding and with the certain knowledge that they would leave India alone and not invade her.

I found evidence to this effect in the diary of the late Count Ciano, Italy's Foreign Minister. In one of his entries during the most anxious period of war for India, he reveals that "Japan is not going to invade India. That is now a settled fact". Subhas must have been in the knowledge of this secret before he agreed to co-operate with the Japs.

The men under him believed in him and all he stood for with passionate devotion. The other outstanding impression which, Mr. Bhulabhai observed, a person in close contact with these men would derive, was their thorough conviction that India's destiny was irrevocably linked up with the concept of unity born of one people, one country, one object—FREE-DOM.

They simply could not think, these three men,—a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh,—that India could possibly be divided. They could think of India only in terms of a great mother and of themselves as her children whom she embraced in one fold

without any distinction. And they regarded it as their solemn duty to stand by her and fight for her freedom as one man, irrespective of what caste, creed or colour he may belong. Caste and creed were meaningless to them. Only Unity and Freedom counted. And it was to them that they had dedicated their lives.

*

*

*

If the fostering of this spirit was a tribute to the qualities of his heart, the creation of the Provisional Government of Free India was a triumph of his mind. Mr. Bhulabhai thought it was Subhas Babu's greatest achievement. A grand conception, he said admiringly, which only an international statesman with a powerful and clear imagination could conceive.

Subhas maintained this Government with all the dignity and formality attached to the normal Governments of other free countries and he succeeded in exacting recognition and respect from all Axis countries. His official letter-heads, marked imposingly in Hindi,—*Arzi Hukum Ai Azad Hind*—became famous and impressed leaders of various countries.

Mr. Bhulabhai specially asked me to note that the letter-heads were inscribed in what they call Roman Urdu only in Hindi and not in English or any other language, thereby claiming equality of his Government with all the rest. It was a little thing, said Bhulabhai, but with a great meaning.

So great was the respect in which, Subhas succeeded in having his Government held, that not only did he obtain recognition for it from all Axis powers, but the Japanese Government actually sent an official Ambassador to his. Here Mr. Bhulabhai spoke of an incident which is of immense significance in calculating the measure of self-respect which the Provisional Government never forsook.

The Japanese Ambassador, Mr. Hachae, arrived without credentials signed by the Japanese Emperor. The explanation given when he visited the Head of the State, namely, Subhas Babu, was that it was not a diplomatic practice to give signed credentials to a representative of Japan going to a provisional government.

Subhas Babu declined to accept the distinction or the explanation and would not receive the Ambassador. Mr. Bhula-

bhai added that it was interesting to note that on this reply being conveyed to the Japanese Emperor, he actually signed and forwarded the signed credentials, which, however, due to the turn in the fortunes of war, never reached Singapore.

As I was expressing my surprise at the amount of importance and influence, equality and diplomatic relations which Subhas Babu had achieved for his Government in so short a period of its existence,—barely eighteen months—Mr. Bhulabhai amazed me still further by mentioning the establishment of the Azad Hind Bank in which twenty crores of rupees were paid as donations to the new Indian State. Its records, Bhulabhai added, are now sealed by the British Government and sixty lakhs left are frozen.

I wondered who could have given such enormous donations and Mr. Bhulabhai revealed that in Great East Asia, there were two and half million Indians who had formed the Indian Independence League.

This League had branches all over East Asia and those became the Executive of the new National Government. Up to date, that is up to June 1944, as many as two lakhs, thirty thousand adult males and females had signed a written pledge of allegiance to the Indian Government and many more signed between June 1944 and April 1945.

So rapidly powerful had the influence of the new Indian State become that the Japanese Government actually ceded the Andamans and Nicobars as part of territory of the new State. They were renamed Shahid and Swaraj.

So extensive were the activities of the new Government that not only did it consist of a military organization but also a semi-civilian body known as the Azad Hind Dal, which was attached to the army and trained for the purpose of administering liberated areas.

And when I asked how much territory they administered and for how long I was told that they governed as much as 25,000 sq. miles of Bisnonpur and Manipur areas within the Indian border for nearly eleven months, till the tide turned against the Indians and the Japs.

Didn't the Japs interfere with or try to have a say in the administration of these territories?

THEY TOLD ME SO

This question brought another remarkable achievement of Subhas Chandra to light. Mr. Bhulabhai enlightened me of a proclamation issued in two parts on the entry of the joint armies, namely, the Indian National Army and the Japs, into Indian territory. One part was signed by Subhas Chandra Bose, as Head of the Indian State, and the other by the General Commanding Japanese forces in South-East Asia.

The proclamation intimated the people of liberated areas that as soon as any territory within the Indian borders was liberated whether by the Indian troops themselves or by the Japs, they would be immediately made over to the Indian National Army to be administered as part of the new Indian State.

This completed Bhulabhai's picture of I.N.A. activities as he drew it for me. It is remarkable evidence that the Provisional Government insisted on its rights and was entirely independent of the Japs. It proves that Subhas only maintained honourable relations of an equal partner with them and was never their puppet, quisling or stooge.

In closing, as I expressed my wonder at Netaji's incredible energy, India's legal colossus smiled and said, as we shook hands, "I haven't told you half!" . . . And now I was wonder-struck about both, Subhas—and Bhulabhai!

12th January 1945.

CHAPTER XXV

THE AXE ON THE NECK OF THE BLACK MARKETEERS

—MR. A. D. SHROFF COMMENDS D. O.

SO the axe has fallen on the necks of the black marketeers—like a bolt from the blue. Admirable in its surprise, fool-proof in its execution, the Demonetisation Ordinance has fulfilled the wish of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—"these black mar-

keteers should be hanged by the neck until dead." They have been morally hanged. And their hanging was long overdue.

That indeed was the only fault which Mr. A. D. Shroff, one of India's great financiers, could find with the Government Ordinances, when I sought his reaction to them. They have come too late. Government would have been able to collect much more black market money if they had made up their minds to launch their scheme earlier. The poor's lot would not have been so hard for so long. They would have been spared the agony of being squeezed of the last pie that they earned by the sheer sweat of their brow.

War, said Mr. Shroff, was the excuse of Government for delaying it so long. It was afraid of the panic that might be created in the country which would adversely affect the war effort.

But apart from this criticism, Mr. Shroff was all admiration for the official step—and all indignation for all those who derided it. It is the duty of every decent citizen to support Government on this, no matter what his political views may be. Any Indian Government would have done the same thing.

It is perfect nonsense, he added, to say as some do that Government has taken this step to fill British coffers. Whatever its faults, let us give Government the credit it deserves this once. It was a very clever move and deserves the country's congratulations from all quarters.

It needed a very strong man to carry it through, continued the man who has never himself lacked the courage of his convictions. And the present Finance Member is that strong man.

He is more than a match for the threat and the guile of the black marketeer and once he has definitely decided on a plan of action, goes through with it fearlessly. If he had been in India earlier, the Demonetization Ordinance would not have stayed for two long and precious years—only in its discussion stages.

No sooner he took office, he saw to what scandalous extent the black market prevailed and what ways and means were employed to evade the income-tax. He realized in a flash that something drastic had to be done to meet the situation. And he did it.

I expressed the common apprehension that the black marketeer, a seasoned expert in escaping from the clutches of the law, might find a way out of even the closely-knit net of the Ordinances,—and the people to suffer by them may be after all the innocent who have honestly made their money.

Mr. Shroff described this fear as being utterly groundless. The Ordinances are absolutely fool-proof and not the worst wiles of the black marketeer can help him this time. He is nothing short of doomed. He will either have to declare and pay the penalty—or else sit tight on his hoard of ill-gained notes, which yesterday ranked him among millionaires and which are reduced today to scraps of paper.

As for the honest man, Mr. Shroff added, he has nothing whatever to fear. His honest declarations are bound to be accepted and his money will be readily paid by the banks. When I pointed out that he was being made the dupe by the unscrupulous, Mr. Shroff retorted that if he were really honest, he would not allow himself to be made a fool of, because Government had no intention of harassing the honest.

Mr. Shroff stressed that Government had not overlooked anything. The interests of the honest were safeguarded and no loopholes were left for the escape of the guilty.

I thought I had found one loophole at least when I mentioned the States. They were not within the orbit of the Ordinance. People were making a dash for them—with their 'luggage' of notes.

It wouldn't help them very much, smiled Mr. Shroff, for though the States may not be within the Ordinance, *all British India money in the States is, just the same.* The only possibility, he admitted, was that in matters of tax evasion, Government will not succeed to the same extent in respect of State subjects as in respect of British Indian subjects.

I wondered why the Rs. 100 notes had been spared. Was it to protect the interests of Government servants who have been among the worst black marketeers of the lot?

Nonsense, Mr. Shroff almost shouted his protest. Government servants will get it as much in the neck as others. It was a very clever move on the part of Government in not demonetizing Rs. 100 notes after giving the impression on the

first day that they would also be rendered illegal.

On that day, Rs. 1,000 notes and notes of higher denominations were still legal tender. Had this impression about the Rs. 100 notes not been given, the hoarders would have rushed to the banks to have their bigger notes exchanged for Rs. 100 pieces. It was only this feint which checked them from doing so. By Monday when it was declared that Rs. 100 notes were not to be demonetized, the Rs. 1,000 and over had already ceased to be legal tender. . . . And so, for once the joke was on the hoarder!

I asked Mr. Shroff if he expected any more ordinances in view of the latest one just passed against mushroom banks. He would not be surprised, he said, if there was one against gold-hoarders. They deserve it as richly as the black marketeers and the hoarders of notes.

Mr. Shroff was particularly severe about the malpractices in some banks. People, he said, who are responsible for the management of insurance companies and banks ought to be the last to indulge in extensive gambling on stock and bullion markets.

Mr. Shroff expressed himself seriously concerned with the alarming deterioration of business morals in the country. And when I argued that we are no worse than the business people of other countries in the world, he wouldn't agree.

Money racketeering is much worse in India than in Britain or America. That perhaps explained why when the Demonetization Ordinance was passed in both those countries, notice and time were given to the holders to do away with their notes.

Mr. Shroff unequivocally condemned these people as being a disastrous influence on the building up of the national character so necessary for a country on the eve of independence.

The Ordinance had come,—no matter what rank nonsense some people may talk about Government's intention to ward off its own bankruptcy or to scale down sterling balances with which the Ordinance had no connection anyway—as a God-send.

God confounds the designs of the wicked and, concluded Mr. A. D. Shroff, the old saying has come true once again.

19th January 1946.

THEY TOLD ME SO

CHAPTER XXVI
SIR PURSHOTTAMDAS THAKORDAS
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS OF D. O. :
PRINCIPLE—AND—PURPOSE

THERE are some people who approve of the Demonetisation Ordinance *in toto*. There are others who accept it with a reservation. There are yet others who reject it altogether. While the first type may be too enthusiastic, the third is too unreasonable. Sir Purshottamdas Thakordas, the eminent Cotton Magnate, escapes both these classes and falls happily in the second.

According to him, just as "to be or not to be is the question" in Hamlet, the principle or the purpose seems to be the question in the Demonetisation Ordinances.

In the hour or so that we sat chatting about it, he expressed his well-balanced fears and hopes on the outcome of the ordinance. He saw two distinct ways of looking at it—*one*: the principle of it; *two*: the purpose in it.

Sir Purshottamdas was emphatic about the principle. No one can question it for a moment. The black marketeer's reign of terror was a very evil thing and any step to check it must be welcomed in principle.

It was the *purpose* of which Sir Purshottamdas was not so sure. He shook his experienced head filled with foreboding. Crushing the black market is all well and good, but what will Government do with all the money it will collect?

Fill the British Treasury with it, I suppose! I suggested. But Sir Purshottamdas did not mean that—exactly. Britain takes pride in saying that she takes no tribute from India—directly.

Here he paused, and then with a smile . . . but you and I both know, Taleyarkhan, that dear Britain has her inscrutable little ways . . . for instance, safeguarding vested interests by importing manufactured articles which would compete with our industry.



Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas
Democratization Ordinance? I don't trust it!

That was the reason, Sir Purshottamdas suspected, why there was general opposition to the ordinance. People were not inspired with sufficient confidence in the motive of Government. They were not sure whether Government would use the money collected for some nation-building activity or for promoting its own ends.

If the people were convinced of Government's genuine intentions, he had no doubt there would be much lesser hue and cry than there was today.

Sir Purshottamdas, however, would not pass any definite judgment. He also saw the good side of Government in this respect—only he could not determine which of the two points of view he mentioned was correct.

In his opinion none of us can answer it. Only a responsible Government, that is an Executive responsible to the Legislature, could deal with it.

Till the advent of such a Government, there is no hope for the country and no relief from the black marketeer. If our people had that "stamina" of character which makes the British people look down on the profiteer who has made millions by criminal ways instead of looking up at him in admiration of his cleverness as some in this country are known to do, if we had that unity of purpose and honesty of intention which gives the American people the capacity to "strike" at their bosses as they are doing today, then indeed India's lot would be different.

Sir Purshottamdas did not mean that we would never attain that measure of self-respect. But it meant time.

The reason why the present Government gets away with any harsh measure is want of unity in general and lack of confidence in each other among us.

The latest of their acts is the present ordinance which has been put less than a fortnight before the Legislative Assembly met with a view presumably to avoid any further delay.

I pointed out the belief prevalent in some quarters that if a test case were made out against the ordinance, it would be successful.

Sir Purshottamdas, while unable to fathom the legal technicalities, did not think it would be possible for the reason that an ordi-

nance sets at nought everything, and so no matter what the all-binding words of unconditional payment there may be on the notes, they could be rendered utterly ineffective by an ordinance.

Sir Purshottamdas did not feel that the honest man had any thing to fear from the ordinance, except the worry of putting in the statements. He felt, however, that more time should be allowed for filling in and handing over the declarations.

At the same time, Sir Purshottamdas did not quite see how this move could completely eradicate the black market. After all, he argued, only a part of the ill-gotten money will be called into account and confiscated.

The black marketeer is accustomed to paying heavy bribes. He may just consider the payment of income-tax to be another sum gone in bribing. And so only a part of his ill-gotten gains will go and not the whole.

Then I should imagine there would be a black market within a black market. By that I mean people in a position to bribe confirming authorities will be able to get away more cheaply than the others and they may escape from the clutches of the apparently fool-proof ordinance by having "fishy" declarations accepted.

But it may not be within the reach of all to do that. Some may not have the resources to bribe, others not the courage. So the cumulative effect of the ordinance is bound to bear fruit.

Sir Purshottamdas sipped his cup of tea and taking a comprehensive view of the picture, he saw a canvas of clashes giving me the impression that he was wandering between two worlds—the one of Principle, the other of Purpose.

19th January 1946.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRAIN BEHIND LITERACY IN THE SERVICE
OF THE MASSES

MR. B. G. KHER

MR. B. G. KHER, twice Prime Minister of Bombay, is not just a politician. He is also a polytechnician.

He will talk politics—but not publicly as far as possible. Public pronouncements, he believes, should be the prerogative only of greater leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel and others. Ask them, the almost supremely unassuming Mr. Kher tells me, whenever I ask him to enlighten me on any political point of view.

But in educational matters, he is in his own. He is the master—and the maker. He has his heart and his soul in them. What finer ideal can a Prime Minister have than to make literate, to educate, to enlighten, the people of his province ! He knows it is the stepping stone to communal unity, to political freedom.

Without literacy, without education, freedom is reduced to merely a parrot's cry. With them, it becomes a galloping power which nothing can stop from generating greater speed at every step—and this is because the desire of the heart is backed up by the reasoning of the brain.

But while this stepping stone is being climbed, Mr. Kher will have none of politics in it. The process of *making the mind* shall have no association with the later stage of *making up the mind*. Otherwise there would be no smooth sailing, such as Mr. Kher wants, towards the goal of literacy and knowledge.

By keeping the waters clear of politics, Mr. Kher has already sailed a long way down the river of his ideal. As founder and President of the Bombay City Adult Education Committee he has succeeded in imparting literacy to over 90,000 people from the slum, chawl and coolie class of Bombay.



B. G. Kher—From Primer to Premier

As founder and President of the Adivasi Seva Mandal, he has brought relief to thousands of aborigines in the Thana District.

"You do not know perhaps, Taleyarkhan," Mr. Kher revealed, "that there are ten lakhs of aborigines in the Thana District alone, that is within thirty and forty miles of your fashionable city—the most primitive aborigines you could dream of, without a single stitch of clothing on them. I wouldn't blame you if you do not know of their existence. For the first forty years of my life, I knew nothing whatever about them."

Before, however, dealing in detail with this multitude so far removed from us if not in distances at least in times, let us examine the work Mr. Kher and his committee have done nearer home.

*

*

*

It is a wrong idea, Mr. Kher corrected me to begin with, that the Bombay City Adult Education Committee deals only with literacy. It does to begin with—but does not stop there. In the very act of learning to read and write, they will be made to use their newly-acquired knowledge. They will be informed on matters of general knowledge. They will be given vocational training.

Founded by Mr. Kher in 1939 during the days of the popular Ministry, it has earned today the blessings even of the existing Government who have maintained Mr. Kher in the presidential chair. This fact alone discountenances any idea of the Committee's purpose being affiliated to a political end.

In this connection, Mr. Kher told me of the one and only occasion when the Governor, Dr. Ambedkar, Sir Ali Mohamed Dehlavi and Mr. Kher himself spoke from a common platform on the occasion of the inauguration of the scheme in 1939. This showed that there were no politics, no parties or party differences, that every caste and creed were united in the laudable intention of promoting the cause of literacy.

But, as I said, literacy is not the be-all and end-all of Mr. Kher's ideals. His programme is influenced considerably by the Wardha Education Scheme which has a section for literacy for villagers.

Though there is the difference created by environments

between the adult in the village and the adult in the city, their opportunities of developing their minds have been none and consequently their standard of intelligence is very low. Hence the principles and the subjects of Mr. Kher's plans are much the same as those which govern Gandhiji's scheme.

They include Health, Education—cultivating the habit of individual and home cleanliness—dietetics, recreations, entertainments, family budgeting, instruction in parenthood, civics, training in co-operative methods and community organization, general culture, elementary knowledge of the world, abstention from evil habits and so on and so forth.

Mr. Kher's ambitions go still further. He does not wish to rest satisfied with giving them knowledge on these matters. He wants to give them an opportunity of earning while they are still learning. And so while they are taught to read and write, they will be also given a supplementary course in various crafts, according to their inclinations.

I was struck by Mr. Kher's vision of making a complete self-contained, self-reliant citizen of illiterate boors, but I could not resist the comment that all this all at once would be a bewildering burden for a mind unaccustomed to grasping and retaining. Wouldn't it be better to go step by step?

It is, however, not Mr. Kher's idea to rush the "mind of the masses". But he does believe that that mind, once set into motion by the wheel of literacy, should not be allowed afresh to rot and rust. If the men and women who have benefited by literacy have nothing to look forward to at the end of their course except to fall back into their former miserable means of living, then the aims and objects of Mr. Kher's Committee would be wasted and lost.

I felt the pressure of this argument. But I was promptly puzzled by another difficulty. There were thousands of men and women from the masses, all talking in different languages. What medium did they use to impart literacy?

Mr. Kher informed me that classes were conducted in no fewer than eight languages—Marathi, Gujarati, Hindustani, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. One's mother-tongue, he felt was naturally the only medium through which anything could be quickly learned.

I thought it a pity though that these citizens of tomorrow should not know and own one great language which would be common to all India. The country has often felt the need of such a common language, intelligible to every Indian.

To take just one recent instance, the great speech which Col. Dhillon made at Chowpatty in Hindustani on the occasion of Netaji Subhas Bose's birthday was reported in barely four or five lines the following morning even in nationalist papers when we should have expected columns and columns filled with it. It was because the reporters could not understand sufficiently well the language he spoke in.

However, I am rushing now. The stage of achieving a common language can only come later, after literacy and education have been imparted to the various mother-tongues of Mother India.

* * *

Nearly five hundred classes with an average attendance of nearly twenty-five are held in three sessions during the year and they are held at times convenient to the working man and woman.

Mr. Kher was very happy about the response obtained from women who in spite of their household duties were anxious to take advantage of these classes. Today the Committee's efforts have turned out over 20,000 literate women, a large percentage of whom are Muslims. Even Pakistan trusts this Committee!

In spite of the nearly one lakh of literate persons whom his own untiring efforts coupled with those of enterprising educationists have yielded in the course of the last six years, Mr. Kher feels the progress is too slow and must be intensified. Hence he has planned to raise the number of classes to 1,000 so that no fewer than 50,000 adults could be "literated" in a year.

Impressed as I was by this ever widening horizon of Mr. Kher's dreams, I questioned him about the teacher problem. Where does he, and will he, get the teachers from? He not only gets a teacher for each class but also a supervisor to keep an eye over every ten classes.

Mr. Kher enlightened me further that the Committee is not satisfied merely with helping the adult complete his four-month literacy course. It holds tests to see if the teaching has gone home before discharging him and even after being discharged,

he is made to attend what are called post-literacy classes where he is given constant practice in reading and writing and supplied with current news, information on problems relating to his daily life, etc.

Mr. Kher's enterprise and anxiety know no end. Now he has had a sub-committee appointed with the express purpose of preparing simple and cheap literature in pamphlet form for free distribution. He read out several titles to me dealing with every aspect of life and usefulness to the common man.

Urge your readers, Taleyarkhan, said Mr. Kher, in winding up our long talk, to help us both individually and institutionally, both financially and physically to achieve our ends and to realize our hopes.

Who can have any hesitation in such a cause which deserves to be developed into a powerful campaign all over India and not just confined to one province. But then there is only one Kher.

2nd February 1946.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SARDAR PATEL TELLS HOW BOMBAY WAS SAVED FROM UNPRECEDENTED CATASTROPHE

IF we are asked to "show cause" why the city of Bombay was not blown up during the recent R.I.N. strike, that cause would be just one man—SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL.

Very few of us realize the vital role that this great Congress leader played in saving our city from the guns of our own navy, from the death and destruction they would have rained on our people and our property.

The full import of his determination to nip the trouble in the bud dawned on me only when I heard the story from Sardarji's own lips. He stuck to his decision through thick and

thin, through many bumps and jolts from many quarters who were foolishly egging on the strikers to use their armed strength.

The misguided element may feel—perhaps because they have escaped the consequences, thanks to Vallabhbhai—that we missed an ideal opportunity of teaching the British the “lesson of their lives”.

They forget the fact that the full might of Germany and Japan could not teach them the lesson. So how could a handful of sloops and minesweepers do it?

All they could have done would have been to blow up our city and ourselves without so much as scratching the British. Did we want that? Was that the lesson we sought to teach? It was a lesson against ourselves. It was suicide. It was no way of getting rid of the British. It was in fact a way of helping the British by our own acts to get rid of ourselves.

In the excess of emotional excitement that prevailed in the city, the Congress leader was the only one to retain his balance of judgment and meet the facts full in the face. He refused to be rushed into taking any step that may be momentarily popular but eventually disastrous.

*

*

*

In the first place, Sardar Vallabhbhai was not consulted about the strike by the R.I.N. ratings. He knew nothing about it till the following day, that is, *after the firing had begun in Castle Barracks*. And then it was only in the nature of a more or less peremptory request by some ratings to declare a *hartal* in the city.

Sardar Vallabhbhai rightly pointed out that he knew nothing about their case; they had not bothered to acquaint him with the cause of their hunger-strike, however justifiable it may have been, and so naturally he could not consent to a sudden *hartal* which would throw the city into panic and start disturbances.

That is the bother of not having a Government of our own, said the Sardar. If we had it, our Ministers would know exactly what is going on. They would go to the barracks and the ships and attend to the grievances on the spot.

At the moment our leaders have no authority to do so and were kept in the dark till it was too late.

Sardar Vallabhbhai, however, promised to enquire into the cause of the firing. He took up the matter immediately with Government and the firing duly ceased by four o'clock that afternoon. But though the firing ceased the tension did not ease. The ratings held some twenty fully armed ships in the harbour, with their guns trained on the city.

Furthermore, the Sardar told me, they had signalled to the ships in the Karachi harbour to follow their example. The Karachi ratings went one step further. They actually opened fire. But the British were ready for them there. They returned the fire. Within fifteen minutes the ratings surrendered with some loss of life.

But that did not help to have any effect on the ratings in Bombay who were obviously instigated to stick to their guns from various quarters regardless of the consequences. Sardar Vallabhbhai impressed on me, that though the citizens of Bombay did not realize it, it was the city's most anxious night.

For there was no saying what these immature boys, of barely eighteen and nineteen, would do, relentlessly urged as they were to take the fatal step of opening fire on the city. They had enough magazine on their ships to blow up the whole of Bombay.

However, Bombay survived the night. In the morning, the situation suddenly took an entirely different turn. The Sardar had refused to declare *hartal* in the city—but the elements intent on mischief had manoeuvred to keep the Congress leader's decision out of some papers and only inconspicuously mentioned in others. As a result the *hartal* took place just the same. Even those who desired to follow the official Congress leader were coerced into observing it at the peril of their shops being looted and gutted.

Disturbances broke out. City hooligans began their career of reckless arson, looting, harming and harassing our own people and their property. And though it was sought to make out that the outbreak was spontaneous and the result of popular indignation, it was quite evident, Sardar Vallabhbhai stressed, that it was premeditated and organized. There was some vicious motive and method in the madness, judging from the fact that it was so systematic, so regular, so persistent.

What could have been the motive? I enquired.

That is obvious—replied the leader—to undermine Congress prestige and power, to bring about division and dissension in its ranks, to upset its programme of non-violence and break its fascination and hold on the people.

The ugly monster of violence grew more animated as the day wore on. The ratings were still in a state of indecision. Vice-Admiral Godfrey's most indiscreet broadcast threatening uttermost violence and wholesale destruction of the Navy had not helped matters. In fact it was like a red rag before a bull.

The stage for a devastating tragedy was all set. Only the signal, the word—"fire"—remained to be given and the guns on all the fully armed ships in the hands of the ratings would have belched deadly flame and hurled deadly havoc on the city.

Fortunately, towards the afternoon of the day the Strikers Committee called on Mr. Patel and sought his advice. He explained to them that it was a mistake on their part in taking to arms and to violence. The consequences would be disastrous. So long as they continued their strike peacefully and non-violently for grievances for which they had no remedy, the matter was not serious but their cause would be lost the moment they took to firing.

When the representatives of the Committee enquired what they should do under the circumstances, Mr. Vallabhbhai told them they had two alternatives before them—surrender now without senseless loss of life—or surrender later, but with unnecessary bloodshed. The British had threatened to use the uttermost violence. That may have been a threat, Mr. Patel felt, but he did believe that the British would not hesitate for a moment to employ all means to break the ratings' offensive.

Having ample means at their disposal they had summoned cruisers, the Air Force and the Army to meet the situation—the ratings would be smashed in no time and with them the entire city of Bombay.

It would be far better to surrender, Mr. Vallabhbhai advised. It was not gallantry or patriotism to fight against overwhelming odds. It was madness. Here the leader gave me the example of Japan, how suddenly it capitulated in front of the atom bomb against which it found itself hopelessly powerless.

In advising them to surrender, Mr. Vallabhbhai assured them that their legitimate grievances would be redressed, there would be no victimisation and that in fact he had already taken up the matter telephonically with Mr. Asaf Ali and Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose to move the motion in the Central Assembly.

The committee were impressed with the leader's advice and intimated their acceptance of the same a little later on.

*

*

*

But the last chapter in the drama still remains to be written. Just as Mr. Vallabhbhai was beginning to feel gratified with every reason with what he had accomplished in the interests of the ratings themselves, the city and the entire country, came a bombshell in the middle of the night.

News came that one group of the ratings had refused to accept the wise counsel of the Congress leader and the committee had consequently turned it down.

It is interesting to note here that this decision was not officially conveyed to Mr. Vallabhbhai by the committee but came through another source. Somebody was evidently interested in keeping it from Mr. Vallabhbhai as it was believed at the time that he was leaving for Lahore—the next morning—and once he was out of the way, they would be able to do as they pleased. *(Of course, the leader had already cancelled his departure in view of the uncertain conditions.)*

They were further instigating the impressionable ratings and inciting the mobs by spreading the rumour that over two hundred ratings had been killed in the firing at Castle Barracks. To what extent deliberate distortion of facts can be taken may be judged by the fact that the actual casualties in the so-called "Battle of Castle Barracks" were only *one or two*!

However, when it was known that Mr. Vallabhbhai was still in the city, the hands of the much-pressed Strikers Committee were strengthened, the instigators knew their game was up and word was sent afresh—officially this time through the committee, —first thing in the morning that in accordance with Mr. Vallabhbhai's advice, the strikers would surrender their ships by eight o'clock that morning as required by the British High Command.

*

*

*

. . . And so ends this memorable chapter in the history of Bombay, with Vallabhbhai Patel emerging as its undisputed leader and hero. Through him, Congress has once again vindicated its policy of non-violence and peace. And by his act he has silenced its critics about its intentions.

The calm and normal conditions that have returned to the city much earlier than we had dared to hope have been entirely the result of the Sardar's effort and not so much that of the terror struck by the military, which was firing indiscriminately and invariably killing the wrong people.

The world will admire Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel for his courageous statesmanship ; the country will be more proud of him than ever, and our city, one and all in it, will give him thanks from the bottom of its heart.

2nd March 1946.

CHAPTER XXIX

SORABJEE RUSTOMJEE DESCRIBES THE SOUTH AFRICAN "INQUISITION" AGAINST INDIANS AND DEMANDS ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

WHAT a sickening concoction of poisonous pus the South Africans are was exposed to me in all its nauseating manifestations by Mr. Sorabjee Rustomjee, the spirited leader of the Indian South African Delegation, now in India to awaken the people to the full realization of the ghastly humiliations inflicted on their brothers and sisters who have their homes in that " smutty " land.

Only the explosion of an atom bomb can adequately describe my indignation and emotion as I attempted to visualize the " scenes " which Mr. Rustomjee's description of some of these " atrocities " brought up to my mind. Here are some:—

In the tramcars of Durban where half of South Africa's



Sorabjee Rustomjee — Economic Sanctions Nothing Else — nothing less

Indian community lives, Indians cannot sit but in the last three seats on each side.

In trains, even when travelling first class, Indians can only travel in a coach attached to the guard's van. The lowest of coloured menials also have their compartment in the same coach and actually occupy the coach when any seats are vacant.

In hotels, Indians are out of the question. There is just one hotel—the Hotel Edward—in Durban which admits Indians. That is where even our High Commissioner stays.

In restaurants, dogs and Indians are not allowed.

On beaches, there is segregation for bathing—even though the waters may belong to the Indian Ocean! A small strip of water in a remote part is reserved for Indians.

No facilities for any sort of protection is provided. Only some Indians themselves do voluntary work as life savers. The Municipality does not give them even a hut for their effort.

In post and municipal offices, in Government institutions, everywhere there is that despicable demarcation—Europeans—Indians.

In case you are not sufficiently shocked, here is the climax: Even when Indians go to pay the taxes which help to feed and flourish South African Municipalities and Government, this damnable distinction is observed.

Even in children, this racial contempt and hatred is fostered from an early age. Mr. Rustomjee told me how once when Gokhale, the great Indian leader, was taking a stroll on the beach a four-year-old brat ran up to his mother and exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, mamma, what a huge big black coolie!"

*

*

*

So that's how our fellowmen are known in South Africa—as coolies, one and all of them without distinction of caste or class, of age or position.

Mr. Rustomjee mentioned several incidents where India's greatest men, including Mahatma Gandhi, were outrageously insulted. Once while going to an important conference, a chip of a liftboy refused to take him up. His reason, "Sorry, no coolies in my lift."

This may have been in 1912. But this sort of thing still

prevails in 1946! Indeed, it is going from bad to worse as years go from one to another.

Before 1912—between 1860 and 1896 to be exact—Indians enjoyed the same rights of franchise as the Europeans. In 1896, they were snatched away on the ground that since Indians did not have any franchise in their own country, there was no reason why they should have any in South Africa.

Till 1924, the Indians had at least the Municipal franchise. They lost even that through the endeavours of a planter who had made his fortune and his career by the sweat of the Indian labourer's brow.

Since then, in spite of a promise of fair distribution of unalienated land in Durban, the Indians consisting of a hundred thousand people which is about the same number as the European population, have been allotted only four hundred acres of land out of a total area of nearly six thousand acres.

In 1927, they had 204 acres; in 1946, they have only 400 acres! All the rest is given to the European community—in spite of the fact that their population in Durban is no bigger than the Indians' and in spite of the promise of fair distribution.

And still Smuts would have the world believe that he cannot afford to make concessions to Indians because they are an economic factor. Mr. Rustomjee laughed bitterly. With 400 acres of land, Indians are going to constitute an economic factor for Marshal Smuts!

Mr. Rustomjee's tale of woe on behalf of his ill-treated fellow countrymen did not stop here. In Durban today, there are 20,000 Indian children without schooling facilities. The reason is not that the Indian community grudges spending on the building of schools, but there is just no land available to them to build them on. Indians wanted to have a technical college. One of them donated nearly Rs. 18,000 and Government was bound to provide a similar sum. The Indians applied to the Durban Corporation for a site. Four years have passed but there is still no reply.

THERE IS PLENTY OF LAND AVAILABLE BUT THE WHITES WANT TO PRESERVE IT FOR ANIMALS! THE ANIMALS CONSIST OF MONKEYS. SO IN SOUTH AFRICA THERE IS LAND FOR MONKEYS BUT NOT FOR INDIANS!

Before 1927, all the monies that were sanctioned by Government for the education of Indian children, were squandered by the Natal legislatures for other purposes. The Rt. Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri when he was Agent-General in 1927 fought tooth and nail and spent all his personal time and his own money to remedy the state of things. He built the Sastri College and handed it over to the Provincial Government for secondary education and for the training of Indian teachers.

When I wondered why it was handed over to Government in spite of its notorious behaviour towards Indians, Mr. Rustomjee said that the Indians took the Cape Town Agreement, then recently made, to be a change of heart—and alas, they were deceived. There was no *heart* to change.

Mr. Rustomjee paused. I took the opportunity of taking a breath of relief after the horrified breathlessness in which I had heard all he had said. The sheer inhumanity, the sheer ingratitude of the South Africans who owe the prosperity of their land entirely to the "blood, toil and tears" of Indian labourers and Indian brains whom they begged to come to their aid in their time of need,—simply beggar description.

What is the remedy, Mr. Rustomjee, I asked all pent-up, there must be some remedy.

That's what we are here for. Not to find it, but to enforce it—*ECONOMIC SANCTIONS*. The former President of South Africa's Indian National Congress, as stout in spirit as he is in physique, as tireless and as fearless in his efforts for the rights of Indians as our own Congress is in theirs for the freedom of India, believes economic sanctions to be the only remedy.

He sought to impress this fact on the Viceroy when he led the Delegation to him recently. But in spite of the fact that the Delegation's case was reinforced by the Aga Khan and Sir H. P. Mody, the Viceroy's reaction was disappointing. All he would say was that the sanctions would apply from 1st July.

It does not seem a very long time, I told Mr. Rustomjee.

Long enough, he smiled in reply, for the South Africans to import all they want, that is, over and above the usual quota fixed for them. He felt that the immediate withdrawal of sanctions was absolutely necessary and justified by the fact that the South African Government had agreed not to have the Round

Table Conference.

I pointed out the apprehension that prevailed in certain quarters that economic sanctions may be detrimental to Indians themselves.

Not half as much as it will be for the South Africans, was the reply.

Conceding a little, Mr. Rustomjee added spiritedly that even if it meant a little temporary trouble for India, we should endure it in order to give more trouble to South Africa.

But then he raised a finger of warning. Economic sanctions will have their telling effect on South Africa only if they are properly applied. There should be no haphazardness about the effort. Wherever South Africa is getting the slightest benefit, she should be instantly deprived, even if it means some inconvenience to us.

For instance, wattlebark is required by South Indians, and at present it is exported from South Africa. This export should be stopped and a substitute found to replace the product. The retaliation, Mr. Rustomjee rightly insisted, must be thorough and immediate.

Besides economic sanctions, the office of the High Commissioner should be abolished. The South Africans feel that his retention is an encouragement to the South African Government to deal as harshly with Indians as they please.

Mr. Rustomjee added with a laugh that the High Commissioner's office was merely like a post office. He merely passed on dispatches from the Indian Government to the South African and *vice versa*. This duty comprised his functions. If all relations with South Africans were broken, it would help to make the question an international one.

Smuts, however, knows that a storm is brewing. Before it bursts, before diplomatic relations are broken off, before India takes her place in the world as a free nation, he is anxious to convert Indians into South African subjects, so that he could growl to our Government in future—"These Indians are South African nationals. They are our subjects. We'll treat them as we like. You mind your own business."

That's the game, the old fellow is trying to play! But Indians are not going to fall into his snare. They will accept

South African citizenship only if they are given and assured for all future time the fullest benefits of franchise.

* * *

Mr. Rustomjee relaxed. The long talk was nearly at an end. I looked round the room. There were several other South African Indians. It occurred me to ask Mr. Rustomjee a last question—how many communities are there among the Indians of South Africa?

Mr. Rustomjee thought for a moment. Then,—“Many, I suppose. But we are not really interested in communities as you understand the term here. *We are just one community.* THE INDIAN COMMUNITY. We have no Hindu mohallas or Muslim mohallas over there!”

And that was the only thing, I thought, which was happy about the lot of Indians in South Africa—THEIR UNITY.

23rd March 1946.

CHAPTER XXX

EPIDEMIC OF STRIKES IN BOMBAY: S. K. PATIL EXPLAINS THERE IS NO ECONOMIC SANCTION BEHIND SWEEPERS' STRIKE

BOMBAY has never known such an epidemic of strikes as it has of recent months. It seems to be never-ending for no sooner one ends another begins. The slightest excuse is turned into a cause for striking work. Sometimes they do not wait even for the pretext. They are like self-starters of a motor car.

This is hardly a creditable reflection on the reputation of the country's most advanced city. It would appear that the toil and the talent of her many sons and daughters for years and decades

have been wasted if this is the sort of "advancement" they have brought.

On the eve of independence when we should determine to make our greatest efforts for attaining a compact and constructive unity founded on a basis of understanding and co-operation, we find our city torn with strife and strike, for which even if there may be some justification in favour of the employees, it should be suppressed by a greater patriotism in a greater cause, the cause of India's freedom, the cause of India's perpetually starving millions.

The Congress Ministries have taken over in several provinces of the country in order to prepare the ground for the greater "things to come." They have announced and started on immediate relief and constructive programmes everywhere.

People, sick and tired of being ruled by Section 93, were craving for the advent of popular government. Now that it has come, what reception has it met, at least in Bombay?

Instead of giving the new ministers a hand of encouragement and friendship which they sought and expected, thousands of city sweepers have gone on strike and—stuck to strike in spite of numerous compromises, concessions and allowances. Instead of greeting them with bouquets and garlands, the city has awarded their arrival with garbage and rubbish heaps. What a sad commentary on our consistency!

The fact that the strike should take place just when the Congress Ministry assumed office was no coincidence but a cold-blooded calculation on the part of a section who style themselves "nationals" and in fact are the grave-diggers of everything decent, dignified and noble in nationalism.

*

*

*

Why, I asked S. K. Patil, General Secretary of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, leader of the Municipal Congress Party, the most hard-working and perhaps the most harassed man in the local Congress organization who is constantly finding ways and means of settling some dispute or other, who is resourceful enough to have something up his sleeve if the dispute persists—I asked Patil why after all these years the sweepers had

thought of this particular time, the time of the advent of the Congress Ministry, to strike work?

And his reply was: "I am sure you are intelligent enough to draw your own inference."

But just in case I wasn't, he elucidated by saying that the idea smacks of an effort to spoil the fair name of the Congress, to cast a slur on its administration and to put as many impediments in its way as possible.

He also did not hesitate to say who was responsible for the effort. He said they had said it, admitted it, gloated in it themselves—the Ambedkarites and the Communists. I need not take his word. I have theirs.

And so thousands of these wretched illiterate menials today are starving, so that the political purpose of their instigators may be served. Not only that. They are putting the lives of thousands more in grave danger by the epidemic that may break out on account of the insanitary conditions prevailing all over the city. But the Ambedkarites and the Communists laugh at that so long as the Congress is harassed and their motive perpetrated.

Supposing you give in a little to the demands of the strikers, purely in the interests of the safety of the city, I suggested to Patil.

Patil nearly shot out of his chair. Give in, Taleyarkhan! he bawled. Do you know that we have given in to them, not a little, not till we can give in no more, but till there is nothing more for us to give in to? Does that make sense?

Not till you have told me all that you have conceded, I replied.

That started off Patil on a list of concessions that the Municipality was prepared to make. That list did not end till, to my amazement, I had counted fifteen solid clear-cut unprecedented concessions which no sweeper of any class could ever even have dreamed of anywhere else in India.

Here they are :—

- (1) *The sweepers wanted a grade. They got it. Till six years ago their basic salary was only Rs. 19. It was raised to Rs. 25 only by the Congress. Today they*

- have a grade of 25-1-35, which means one and all of them automatically start on a basic salary of Rs. 30.
- (2) Five rupees more are given to every sweeper engaged in doing unclean work, like getting into manholes, loading and driving dirt carts and so on.
 - (3) One day off every week—a concession never before made.
 - (4) Fifteen days' privilege leave with pay during the year. No leave with pay was allowed hitherto.
 - (5) Fifteen days' casual leave with pay in the year.
 - (6) Free Quarters or in the absence of the availability of such premises, six rupees allowance per family or three rupees per head.
 - (7) Injury leave with pay. That is, in case a worker is hurt in the course of his duties, he would be allowed leave with pay.
 - (8) Maternity benefits for wives of workers and for female workers.
 - (9) Compassionate allowance. If any employee is in distress, his case would be taken into consideration and an adequate additional allowance made.
 - (10) Special gratuity.
 - (11) Provident Fund.
 - (12) Money for uniforms. They are given the necessary money to have their uniforms made.
 - (13) Twenty-two rupees Dearness Allowance.
 - (14) TIPS. The sweepers are not debarred from doing private work which brings them a lot of tips.
 - (15) Equal emoluments for men and women alike. No municipality in the world has ever taken the extraordinary step of equalising the pay rolls of both men and women.

*

*

*

These are the fifteen concessions as astounding in their generosity as in their quantity.

What Municipality, I ask, can do what more?

Less the tips, counting all, each employee will get sixty-five rupees in all, or one hundred and thirty rupees per family.

No Municipality in India, not even the Calcutta Municipality which is supposed to be generous, has come within fifteen rupees of this amount.

Our Municipality has actually given twelve rupees more in all to each worker. That means it will have to spend thirty lakhs more over just sweepers' salaries. That means again that out of a total budget of five crores, eighty lakhs will be spent on them alone.

At the end of this recital, Patil seemed to be overawed himself by the length to which he had gone.

I wonder, he said, where the Municipality is going to fetch the money even for what it has committed itself to.

He concluded that if they do not accept even these most liberal of terms, then the Congress would have to draw the only conclusion that it was no economic end that inspired the strike but some other ulterior motive.

The leaders of the Sweepers' Unions have gone to such an extent that they refuse to see the Municipal Commissioner or even the Government. They demand the Commissioner's presence on their premises if he wishes to negotiate with them. Not only that. The latest is that the Ambedkarites refused to respond to the invitation of Government itself.

Patil came to the plausible conclusion that soon the citizens will get sick and tired of this nuisance and once they learn to stand on the principle of self-help by organizing, as the Congress has already done, citizens' sanitary squads, they will treat with contempt the intransigence which the sweepers feel is their power today.

13th April 1946.

CHAPTER XXXI

JAI PRAKASH NARAIN SPITS FIRE AT THE
CABINET MISSION

IF you look at Jai Prakash Narain, he will give you, as he gave me, the impression of being the docile variety of a patriot.

But that is only if you choose to judge him by sight and not on performance. For so long as he just looks, that firm, determined curve of his chin apart, his eyes and indeed the rest of his countenance betray a unique softness which may be likened to a lamb's.

I may be mistaken. Perhaps his expression conveys that nobility of character which is known to stop at nothing and yet stoop to everything in reaching the Great Objective for which men like Jai Prakash Narain seem to be born.

However, it is only when he starts talking that the vision of a lamb rapidly vanishes and is replaced by that of a lion, every inch a match for the British lion. First the low growl as he shows his annoyance, then the roar as he gets impatient—and finally the charge as he can bear it no longer.

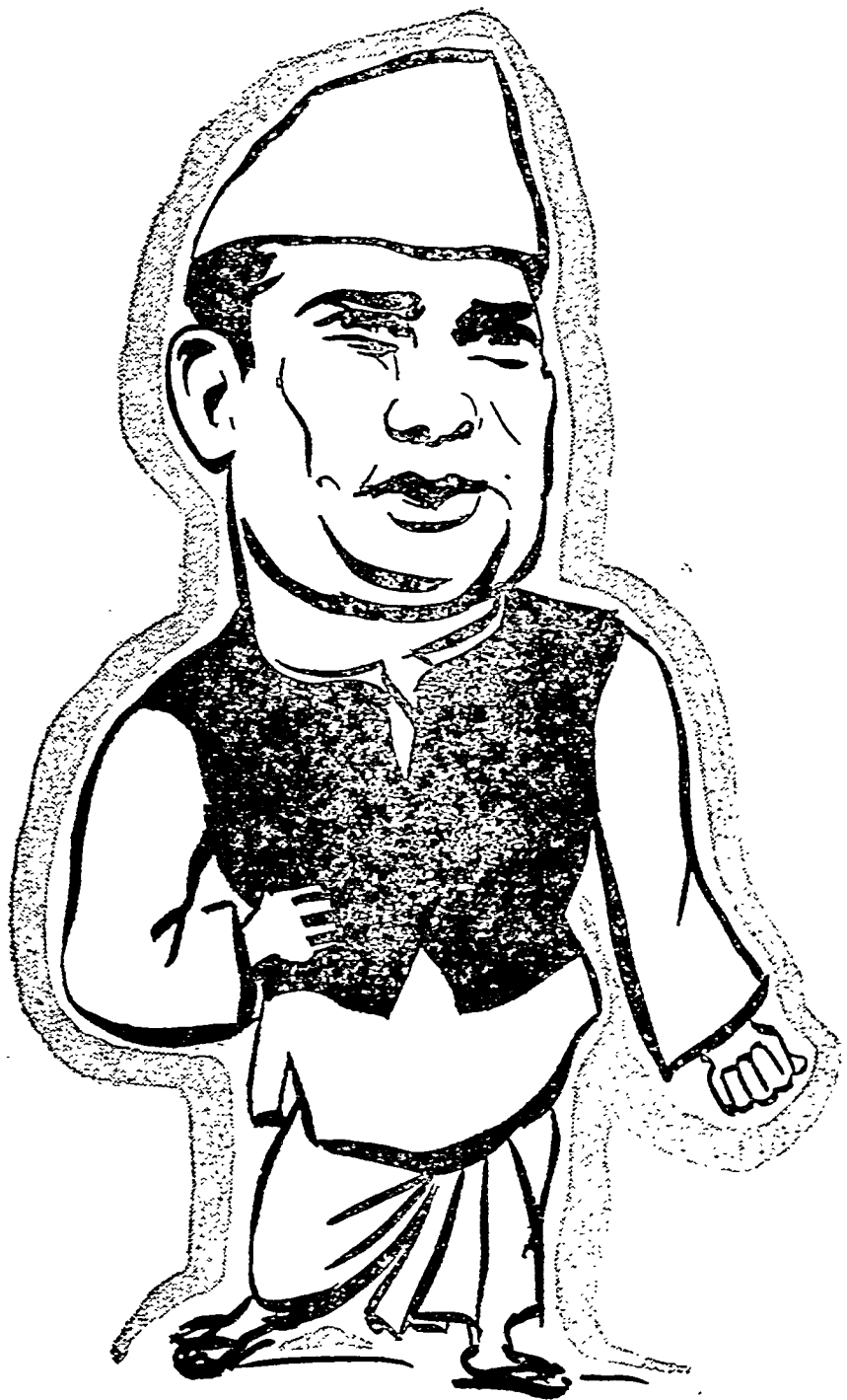
*

*

*

He bore it for over three years—a life which was much worse than being in jail. Which was much more like being in hell, the life of the underground, the life of the constantly hunted and the haunted,—all this gallant endeavour of endurance so that the masses, only lately drawn out of the shell of suppression and dilatory contentment by the efforts of the great Congress leaders, may not sink back into the shell during their absence in jail.

I will not attempt to discuss the ethics and the arguments of the far and few like Jai Prakash who in spite of associating themselves fully with the August Resolution, decided not to follow the leaders and their army behind bars.



Jai Prakash Narain — Come one, Come all!

Nor will I embark on futile speculation about their deeds and the amount of good they did by their methods. Only time can tell and the time is not yet. Suffice it to say that the privations they suffered for the cause they served have earned our highest admiration whether we be in agreement or otherwise with their policy.

Jai Prakash and I talked about everything for nearly an hour. He did most of the talking, I contenting myself with an occasional question or venturing to express an occasional opinion.

He began by feeling very unhappy about press reporting in India. Language difficulties often caused the most bewildering misrepresentations and uncalled for emphasis being laid on the most insignificant passages of a speech at the cost of those the speaker may have wanted to stress.

He added with a laugh that that was not all. Even his future programmes of tours and engagements are printed and published—without his slightest knowledge not only of their publication but even of the programmes themselves. Most of them are evidently the product of the fertile imagination of the resourceful reporter who manufactures leaders' programmes—as if they were soaps or laundry chips!

At this moment Jai Prakash looked at me dubiously. I hastened to assure him he shall see what I'll say before it sees the light of day!

Jai Prakash expressed himself strongly in favour of Hindi being the national language and becoming the only medium for leaders to reach the people of India no matter to what class they belonged, whether they be the masses, the middle class or the cocktail class!

When I asked him to address the Progressive Group,* he said he would do so in Hindi. I hesitated, looked shamefaced and pleaded that though it would be a most excellent thing, the majority of our members, like the majority of our reporters, would reduce the speech to a mess of bewildering misrepresentations. And that is saying the least!

He laughed but looked troubled. They must learn to understand it, he said sternly.

* The author is the President of the Progressive Group.

I said it would be the next best thing if he said so in his speech.

But he retorted they would all nod their heads sagaciously—in the happy conviction that the speaker after him and the third speaker, will address them in English!

We left it at that.

*

*

*

We came to more important matters. The bigger issues,—the country's independence, the fight for freedom, the farce of the Cabinet Mission, the fracas of Pakistan.

I asked him the conventional question of the moment. How far do you believe in the Cabinet Mission?

He gave me an unconventional reply: How far! he exclaimed, I haven't started to believe in it to say how far.

And then he burst out in a tirade against the real British intention. Their intention was never to part with power. Their intention was to play on and perpetuate communal differences so that they may be able to make them appear as the cause for the breakdown of negotiations. If there was ever any sincerity about the Mission, it was only in respect of these intentions.

Then you were altogether against co-operation with the Mission in any way?

Right from the beginning, Jai Prakash asserted, *unless* they were prepared to negotiate with me on my terms to which if the delegation were honest they would have readily agreed.

And what would those terms have been, I queried.

That brought Jai Prakash to the most important, the most impressive and the most convincing part of his arguments.

Before agreeing to discuss anything with them or trusting their motives, he said, I would have made it a condition precedent. . . .

(1) *To release all the political prisoners.*

(2) *To give a guarantee about British capital. That is by paying up the heavy loan which Britain has taken from India, by transferring investments in India to Indians.*

(3) *The most important condition. He would tell the Cabinet Mission that they should confine their talks merely to the*

ways and means of settling Indo-British problems and overcoming Indo-British difficulties, problems pertaining to the complete withdrawal of the British Army and the liquidation of civil servants, etc.

Everything else, everything internal, everything pertaining to the domestic differences between the various communities or the various political parties, should be completely forgotten for the time being.

Indeed it should be made clear to them, Jai Prakash stressed, that it was none of their business to meddle with our internal matters. We would settle them ourselves when the time came.

But would Jinnah accept such a basis for negotiation?

Jai Prakash cut short my question by saying: I am not concerned with what Mr. Jinnah would have done. I am merely telling you that if I were the Congress High Command, I would not have agreed to enter negotiations except on these conditions—that was the only way of helping India to get her freedom—one free India, instead of being torn to bits and pieces.

That may be so, I agreed but pointed out that surely Jai Prakash did not imagine for a moment that had these conditions been sought to be imposed, the Mission would have accepted them.

He didn't.

I could not resist a prompt interruption: And then there would have been a breakdown even before the effort had a chance?

Quite! the underground hero agreed again and without pausing for breath lest I may interrupt again, he continued hurriedly. The breakdown was inevitable, but they would not have been able to put up the prop of internal dissensions as the excuse for the failure which they happily knew was in store.

This is the excuse they wanted in order to create world opinion in their favour regarding their so-called "genuine desire" to hand over power to the Indians. We played into their hands. Instead of forcing a breakdown on the Indo-British issue, we let them play their game and thrust all the responsibility of the failure on us, keeping themselves, the real culprits, clean out of the whole dirty business.

This was undoubtedly a forceful argument. They did the same thing during the Simla Conference. They were repeating it now. One local paper has already carried the report that in America, the papers do not blame the British for the failure of their "effort." So it worked out according to the plan under our very noses.

When I suggested that it would seem, to put it mildly, that the Cabinet Mission looked with an approving eye at the recalcitrant attitude adopted by the League as did Wavell at the time of the Simla Conference, Jai Prakash had no doubts about it. Perhaps with some difference in the technique! That was the only difference he saw.

It is strange, I thought, that they were able to get away with their game, even after all the discussions they had with all the leaders and the leading men of the country. They must have been surely convinced which way the wind was blowing and still dared to sail against it.

They knew it all along, Jai Prakash bellowed, even without the aid of all these studiously planned and timed interviews. These talks are their technique, their fine art of wasting time. They knew everything and everybody's point of view, much before they stepped into India.

Jai Prakash was warming up. Do you mean to say he said, that their decades of rule, of experience of Indian conditions and difficulties, the knowledge of the Simla Conference and the information which must have been supplied them by the so-called Goodwill Mission which had only come here as salesmen of sympathy for the present Mission—had not told them all they wanted to know and could have known?

Before I could even nod in agreement, the shrewd leader, comparatively young in years but ripe in experience of British tactics, continued vehemently: But, Taleyarkhan, they know our weakness. They know we are fond of talking. So they let us talk and talk. It suited them ideally.

I remembered Sarat Chandra Bose told me the same thing in Calcutta. We talk too much. I remembered the Rt. Hon'ble Dr. M. R. Jayakar told me much the same thing. When he saw the members of the Mission, they let him do all the talking, in spite of his repeatedly inviting them to ask him questions. He

talked for 65 minutes. They did not ask a single question either in between or at the end of it.

They knew everything. Cripps thought he knew too much. He gave Jai Prakash the same impression. He was fooling us and we allowed ourselves to be fooled in spite of being fully conscious of it!

Supposing, I said by way of argument and not with the slightest hope of its realization, supposing the Attlee Mission had decided unequivocally in favour of One India, do you think the Muslims would have accepted it without a murmur?

Cripps asked me precisely the same question, said the man of steel. He admitted that the Leaguers would create some row and some riots, but they would never reach the magnitude of a civil war.

He added significantly that if the bureaucrats kept neutral in the matter and did not play the role of inciters, he was sure that a settlement between the Congress and League, between the Hindus and the Muslims would be speedily reached.

Supposing, I asked Jai Prakash my last question, the one-nation theory is conceded as it will have to be one day, what attitude would you adopt towards the Muslims?

Very conciliatory, said the Socialist leader whose dignified restraint of expression and emotion had struck me all along. But, he clarified, while my attitude would be conciliatory towards the Muslim masses—they are just misled and a little reasoning and a constructive programme would convince them—it would be very stiff towards the leading Leaguers. They have been the quislings of the country and must be brought to heel for the safety of India.

It was a fighting finish from a man who loving freedom and no less peace has yet the strength of courage, character and conviction to be fearless and independent without being indiscreet in both word and deed.

24th May 1946.

CHAPTER XXXII

SARDAR SARDUL SINGH WARNS AGAINST
COMMUNAL POISON

A CHARMING man, black-bearded, white-turbaned Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar deputizing as leader of the Forward Bloc in the absence on temporary "leave" from the country of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose,* made an implicit impression on me.

Whatever his views, I concluded before he had begun, he must be honest and sincere about them. I found much to disagree with, as our talk proceeded but nothing to doubt.

He earnestly believed that his was the only answer to India's troubles. There could be no other. His solution was simple.

A revolution, a civil war.

Every country on its way to independence must go through it. Russia went through it. France had hers. Americans fought among themselves for six months before their country emerged the one great united power that she is today.

Is me kia besad hai! What is there to it, commented the Sardar casually as he twisted the tails of his richly-groomed moustache. At any rate we would not lose half as many lives in a revolution or a civil war as the millions we have lost by starvation. And besides our revolution or civil war would not be as severe, bloody or as long as the European ones.

First of all we haven't got the weapons and then we shall not have the will to kill each other. The people in the villages, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, anybody, live in the bliss of friendliness unspoiled by the happy ignorance of what the politicians are brewing.†

* At the time of writing this article, it was generally believed that Subhas Chandra Bose was alive.

† Sad to say this has not been borne out by events that have come to pass.



Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar — Forward

The Sardar went so far as to add that our civil war, if it must come, will be nothing more than the slightly enlarged version of the rioting with which India is already so familiar.

Don't you think, I asked, that even this little bloodshed could be avoided by getting as much of freedom as possible from the Cabinet Mission now sojourning at Delhi?

This was the signal to open fire. The Sardar's first cannon burst in the thick of the Mission's ranks. They mean to give nothing that is substantial. They just mean to perpetuate British power in India. We must not touch any of the tit-bits offered by these "Mission-makers". We must have none of this scrambling for crumbs thrown from the Imperial table. We should take the whole feast or nothing. The whole freedom or nothing. The British must give it or we must take it. . . .

It was evident Sardar Sardul Singh meant business.

But I still played about with the idea of the Cabinet Mission. Our leaders have been tinkering with it for the last so many weeks. So why shouldn't I? I thought. . . .

So I asked—why not take something now so that we may get all later? And I looked forward to another outburst from the Forward Bloc President. I wasn't kept in suspense for a minute.

Take what—unless you are fond of poison, thundered the Sardar Saheb.

Poison! Are the Cabinet Mission offering us poison? I thought the Sardar was trying to poison my ears against the pious missionaries.

Yes, of course, came the roaring rejoinder, *communal poison*. Division of India into so many parts. That's what they are giving you. They are not giving you any sovereign powers. The Constituent Assembly has been given none.

That was the chief grouse of the Sardar. The Constituent Assembly meant nothing without sovereign powers. It would be ridiculous. It would be a joke. The British were trying to impose conditions on its working before it had a chance even to start. In other words, they have bound India hand and foot to accept what they impose and not left her free to choose what make of constitution, what form of Government may be most suited to her.

If they were genuine in their intention to transfer complete

power to us, to offer us unconditional freedom, why do they seek to impose these conditions?

The Sardar answered his own question: They have created the condition of communal representation for their own benefit. It is the same old story. It dates back to the Minto Mission days. Remember, how it was engineered, that Minto Mission? asked the Sardar and he went on to refresh my memory about other things in that connection. Remember, how Maulana Mahomed Ali himself had called it a "command performance"? And who drafted it? Remember? The then principal of the Aligarh College under the instigation of the political department!

So you think it is no better today?

I don't *think*, my man; I am *convinced* of it, said the Sardar in order to cut short any element of speculation that may arise from mere thinking! The Cabinet Mission of today is not taking us one step forward to what was offered us in those days.

I continued to look sceptical, though the ammunition of my arguments was fast giving out. But the President of the Forward Bloc was bent on bringing about a total eclipse of my doubts and he capped his effort superbly by hitting on the "Quit India" Resolution.

Sardar Sardul Singh said we were bound by the "Quit India" Resolution. Did I find any suggestion of "quitting" in the Cabinet proposals?

No, I admitted.

Well, there you have it. We cannot accept anything that is not in the spirit of that Resolution and does not ensure its accomplishment.

It was the last straw and I wilted.

But more was to come. Jinnah had jumped on these proposals as soon as he was told that he would get nothing more out of the British. That here was his last and supreme chance. Why not take it? He took it. But the Congress High Command has awakened at last. They have realized the right of the majority to set aside the unreasonable demands of the minorities, even if that minority be commanded by Mahomed Ali Jinnah. The Congress had turned down the principle and practice of parity. Sardar Sardul Singh told me that I might say that one of the first three—not one of the first six—of the topmost Congressmen,

with whom he had a talk the other day, assured him that the Congress would never accept parity.

Again in the question of the States, thought the Sardar, the Cabinet Mission had not played fair with the Indians. The present treaties that exist between the States and the British Government are most favourable to the Princes inasmuch as they can boss, bully and treat the people as they please. The British can of course brush them aside whenever it suits them. But if similar treaty relations prevail when the Union Centre, if at all, comes into being, it would be powerless to deal with the autocracy of the Princes. So, if these treaties are to remain intact, paramountcy would mean nothing.

The British want it that way.

Here again you see, the Sardar pointed out, the British effort to divide and split India.

I couldn't help seeing it.

These tactics drove Subhas Babu mad, said the great disciple and devotee of Netaji. He knew that no amount of negotiation and bargaining would get India anywhere. He couldn't convince the Congress of that. He couldn't make them see that the militant attitude was the only one that could be adopted. He saw that the Congress policy had come to a deadlock and rather than cause a split in the ranks of the national organization, he took the great decision to leave his country and seek help for it from without.

Sardar Sardul Singh revealed to me that Netaji had made up his mind to leave India a year before he actually did so. He did believe that the British would lose the war—and the Sardar added that they had lost it in fact. It was only Russia and America who saved her. Subhas had not banked on so much vital aid being given by these two countries to Britain.

But, the Sardar asserted, never for a moment did Subhas Babu collaborate with the Japs against the cause and the interests of the country. He made his mind clear to the Japs and they accepted his conditions because they believed that any additional resistance to the British would weaken their fight against them.

How did Subhas first contact the Japs? I asked.

That brought another revelation from the lips of the Sardar.

Subhas had sent Lala Shankar Lal a year ahead to Japan before she was in the war to contact the Jap authorities and get their reaction to his ideas of forming an Indian National Army on the soil or the territory of the Japs.

This quiet, little-known, little-wanting-to-be-known Shankar Lal's mission was the most dangerous one ever undertaken and successfully. For he not only went to Japan but he also returned to India equipped with all the necessary information to prepare the background of the now famous I. N. A.

Sardar Sardul Singh dwelt for a while on the hardships suffered by the I. N. A. of which we know so much already, but which reminded me of what the Sardar himself has suffered during his nearly four years of incarceration in various jails of British India. Released only in February last, the Sardar has gone through gruelling trials.

He was not tortured directly but the same effect was brought to bear on him indirectly. For instance the cells in the Lahore Fort are so constructed that the prisoner gets no respite from the merciless rays of the sun during the hottest months of summer ; he gets no air in the monsoon because the windows are situated very high up in the cells ; he gets no light in winter because he is completely cut off from ventilation.

The Sardar said that not satisfied with this, they even served him with food which he was not accustomed to eat. He added with a laugh that they deliberately put *chillies* in his meals because they knew they did not suit him and he couldn't eat them.

In other words they made things as hot for him as they could just as he is making it for them now with plenty of masala thrown in!

15th June 1946.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DR. SYED HUSSAIN MIXES PRAISE WITH BLAME
FOR AMERICANS AND INDIANS—BUT MAKES
NO MISTAKE ABOUT THE BRITISH

ANY impression of irascibility which Dr. Syed Hussain, journalist, author, scholar, patriot, chairman of the National Committee for India's Freedom in Washington, may have given me at a meeting of the Journalists' Association—which is indeed the melting-pot or rather the testing-pot of all tempers!—faded into one of mild irritability in a subsequent talk I enjoyed with him at his hotel a little later on.

The trouble with our journalists is, he said, that they ask you a question and want you to answer it the way *they would like it*, not as you see it. For instance, he added that if he had said that the Americans never sit down to breakfast every morning without first lynching a Negro baby, they would have been charmed. Ah, now we know what stuff the Americans are made of, they would have said in evident satisfaction, quite regardless whether it is the *real* stuff. That is the stuff they like.

But you see, Taleyarkhan, the doctor pointed out, I couldn't say it because it is not true. Now if you ask me why it is not true, I wouldn't be able to answer it, would I?

It was almost an appeal and I laughed my agreement.

After assuring him that I had not come to lynch his patience, I asked him what he thought was the duty of the press as he saw it in America where journalism is so advanced and so prosperous?

The real duty, Dr. Hussain replied, is for the paper to give both the sides fairly, and strongly support its own editorially. He even went to the length of giving the press the right to criticise and pull up the leaders when necessary. They must not be allowed to feel by their power and popularity that they were sacrosanct and free to follow whatever direction they chose, right or wrong. They must be constantly under the vigil and the



Syed Hussain — Now, in America

whip of the press to keep them straight.

I thought it needed a lot of courage to say it. But Dr. Syed Hussain has it. One look at him will tell you that he has the power of personality—even if unfortunately no other power.

*

*

*

Dr. Hussain runs a paper of his own in the U. S. A., called *The Voice of India*.

Is it sent to India? I asked because, to be quite frank I told him I hadn't seen it.

That made him burst. But not at me. He burst at the British. These fellows have been playing ducks and drakes with us, he fumed, you are not the first one to say you hadn't seen the *Voice of India*. They just do not let it get here.

Do they let anything else get in or get out of here, doctor, except what they want to?

That is perfectly true, rejoined the doctor, that's what we have been fighting against all this time, against the maddening censorship of news to, of and from India.

And during the war, the doctor added, it became intolerable. Not only was there complete suppression of all truthful news, but the British anti-Indian propaganda was so furious and outrageous that we were compelled to start the National Committee for India's freedom in order to stop the systematic misrepresentation of India to the Americans.

Why did you wait so long? Why couldn't you have started much earlier, I asked and pointed out the amount of publicity that is given to and the amount of popularity achieved by China and her cause? Couldn't we have got the same if we had tried by establishing an India Office or something like his committee?

Dr. Hussain slapped his knees but did not snap at me as I was amused to think he would. A patient "my dear man" was all that came out of him by way of a preface to his subsequent elaboration.

My dear man, China is a sovereign State. China maintains her embassy. China has consulates all over the States. China has vast business connections with America. China has twenty-five thousand students studying in the colleges and the universities of U. S.

Having finished this recital, the doctor asked in a tone of subdued triumph—Has India any of these? In the first place, she is not a sovereign nation and that makes all the difference. After we become a sovereign nation then, my dear Taleyarkhan, you may expect all that you are wishing for today.

Why can't we start from now, I persisted, after all we are on the eve of this sovereignty—though I admitted to myself that this "eve" has been rather too prolonged.

We *have* started, asserted the doctor. The National Committee for India's Freedom and the India League are doing a lot of good work in their respective ways. But the fact remains—and the doctor slowed down to drive it home—that India is much more remote to the average Americans than, say, even the tiny provinces like Chile and Peru.

That is why Chile and Peru and other places command more interest and more space in American papers than India does. You see it, don't you?

I nodded and he continued, more confidently: Their domestic interests are so tremendous that the papers are simply crowded with their own news. They have numerous music concerts, plays, art exhibitions and what not that they simply. . . .

I simply could not resist an interruption at this point: You mean to tell me, Dr. Hussain, that concerts and art exhibitions are more important than India's freedom?

To the Americans, by all means, thundered the doctor. It is *their* life. What do they care for yours with whose they have so far no connection whatever?

Besides, the doctor added, we cannot command respect abroad when we have no self-respect at home.

I felt like jumping at that. But I sank back into my chair. It was true. We are still a slave country.

Pressing home his advantage, the doctor worked up another point. Furthermore, will you tell me how many of our eminent leaders have come to America and spoken to the Americans?

I knew they could be counted on my finger-tips. First of all Swami Vivekananda, then after a long time, Lala Lajpat Rai, followed by Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, more recently Vijayalaxmi Pandit, one or two others at most.

What impression did they make? I sought to know.

They made a great impression by the magnetism of their unique personalities and by the authority with which they spoke. He deplored that more top-ranking leaders do not come that way. They converted so many to sympathising with India's cause. I thought they had quite enough on their hands in one country to try and convert another.

The influence of these three or four leaders apart, the Americans have naturally shown and taken interest in their own affairs, said the doctor.

In their concerts and exhibitions? I sneered. But lest I should follow the example of my contemporaries and say, "Ah, now we know what stuff the Americans are made of!", Dr. Hussain hastily explained: Make no mistake—India plays a prominent part where world values are concerned. The leading politicians and statesmen are not ignoring her and in fact are allocating to her her quota of interest in the light of her importance.

Is her importance sizable even to the American statesman? I asked sceptically.

Oh yes! the doctor replied with optimism. The war has made a world of difference. India became not only a buffer but the point of transmission between America and China on the one hand—so impregnable was the Jap blockade that India was the only way of reaching China—and between America and Russia on the other.

This has made America tremendously India conscious, so much indeed, added the doctor, that Roosevelt repeatedly raised questions about her.

Is anything being done to sustain that consciousness now that the war is over?

Dr. Hussain said that the National Committee for India's Freedom and the India League were doing all they could.

Are they two rival bodies, I enquired, somewhat untactfully, knowing as I did that Dr. Hussain was the chairman of the former.

But I was happy to hear that they were working if not exactly hand in hand, at least for the same end, though their approach, because of their respective formations, may be different.

Dr. Hussain clarified that the India League's strength lay not

in the one or two Indian executives it had, but in the influential Americans, including Pearl Buck, Albert Einstein, Richard Walsh and others who were its members. The India League because of its American membership therefore has the advantage of a direct approach to the American Government.

While the National Committee of India's Freedom suffers from the handicap of not having influential Americans on it, being a purely Indian body, with purely Indian membership, it has the corresponding advantage of being able to represent India and claim to speak for her. So that whenever India's reaction is sought, this body feels itself entitled to give it and is naturally referred to.

The doctor really revealed his irascibility when I asked him if this committee had any sanction behind it to speak for India.

What sanction do we need? He raged. We don't represent any one political party or other. We speak for the whole of India.

And that led to the revelation of a very admirable policy which the doctor is following. He refuses to discuss the political differences of India in America. He presents a united front—no Congress and no Pakistan. Only India. Our differences belong to us, he tells the Americans, and it is none of your business. All you should be interested in is the battle between India and England, not between Congress and Pakistan.

Is much known about Pakistan in America?

Much ! The doctor exclaimed, you have no idea how much the British have been trying to spread the knowledge of Pakistan and smearing the name of the Congress, so much indeed that in one debate in which I represented India, my British opponent said, "Oh, but Dr. Hussain can give only the Congress point of view. We must have a League Muslim as well to complete the picture of India."

It was shocking, I thought.

The doctor admitted it was, but added mournfully that our leaders were playing into British hands. Our total national leadership has failed to prevent the British from playing the game of playing up our domestic differences in the eyes of the world, as being the cause of our failure to attain freedom. These views tallied fully and admirably with those expressed to me by Jai

Prakash only a few weeks ago—that we should never enter into any parleys with the British except those which concerned Indo-British relations, problems and difficulties.

Dr. Hussain added in despair that so long as one of the major minorities wanted the British to stay—so long as they said we would rather have the British Raj than the so-feared Hindu Raj—we would have to face the ignominy of world contempt.

For a moment I thought he seemed to lose his poise in the emotion which the tragedy of his country excited in him.

In that moment I knew that Dr. Syed Hussain's 25 years abroad had not cooled his ardour for India's cause.

22nd June 1946.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DR. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA SEES NO FUTURE IN SHAM OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY.

DR. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA has a mind as sharp as a razor blade and as clear as a blue summer sky. During practically a whole evening I spent with him I could not see a wisp of cloud in his arguments nor a trace of hesitation in his massive and masterly marshalling of facts.

His clear grasp of a situation, however complex, leaves your own grasping power gasping for breath, as he rattles off point after point, one reason after another to substantiate his views.

His view of the forthcoming Constituent Assembly was as gloomy as the weather forecast in the monsoon months. More rain. Which means in politics, as it does in cricket: *No play*.

"There is no future in it," was the Doctor's cryptic reply when I asked him what he thought of the Constituent Assembly. I was astonished. A member of the Working Committee to hold that view!

"I am no longer a member of the Working Committee," replied the doctor with a quiet smile. At today's meeting they ap-



Pattabhi Sitaramayya — Sham — Shame

pointed a new Committee. I am *not* in it. Therefore, I am now free to speak."

He was almost glad. But I was astonished afresh. Had they actually left out one of their finest brains?

Yet, it *was* true.

But the doctor refused to linger or to grouse upon what the others would have made a grievance.

"You were asking . . . ?" he began.

"Ah, yes," I said, recovering from the shock of the news. "I was asking you about the difficulties you saw in the way of the Constituent Assembly."

"Oh, any number of them," he replied, and some of them, he felt, might be insurmountable ones. To begin with, there will be trouble over *the rules of procedure*. Congress has definitely disapproved of the system of grouping. The Muslim League will insist on it—and that will be the first big hurdle.

For instance, Dr. Pattabhi pointed out, Congress representatives in Assam will refuse to go into sections by seven against the League's three. Similarly, in the North-West Frontier Province, where the Congress will again reject the system of grouping by two-to-one. According to the Cabinet Mission's declaration, the League will insist on the division.

Knowing all this, I wondered why the Congress had, at all, agreed to accept the formation of the Constituent Assembly.

The doctor stood by the Working Committee in his reply. He said this would form a part of the procedure. The moment the Constituent Assembly meets, the Congress will insist on the right of the Assembly to frame its own rules of procedure. And, as the Congress will be in majority, the rules will be after their making.

"How will the League take that?" I asked.

"They will not take it *lying down*," laughed the ex-Working Committee member. "They will make a fight of it. They will raise the communal issue."

"Will the communal issue be allowed to be raised in the Constituent Assembly?" I enquired.

"That's the whole point," explained the doctor. "It is in the hands of the Chairman to decide. Because, once Parliament has taken steps necessary for ensuring sovereignty to the people of India—subject to two conditions, namely, Minority Rights and

Treaty Making—the rest will be in the hands of the Assembly to decide.”

“Will the League have to accept the Chairman’s ruling or will they have the right to appeal elsewhere?” I put in.

The Doctor appreciated this question by saying: “That’s another important point. They may appeal to the Federal Court.”

“But the ‘beauty’ of it,” added the doctor with a merry chuckle, “is that the decision of the Court will not be binding on the Speaker of the Assembly. He may or may not choose to accept it. The Federal Court can be referred to only in a consultative capacity.”

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya added that there is also the possibility that the Federal Court may refuse to interfere at all, because the fixing of the rules of procedure is not a statutory document and, therefore, not a legal issue. The Court may also decline on the ground that, since its decision is not taken to be final, it would not like to run the danger to its dignity in case it is overruled by the Speaker.

“But, supposing it does decide to interfere,” I asked the visualizer of many possibilities, “what then?”

Then, he conjectured, it depends on their decision. If it is in favour of the Congress, the League will walk out, like Gromyko from the United Nations over the issue of Iran. And, if the decision of the Court will favour the League, the Congress will troop out. A very happy state of affairs! commented the unhappy visualizer ironically.

But this is only one of the difficulties. Perhaps, only a “baby” in comparison with the many more which the doctor followed up with.

The second difficulty will be voting in the sections:—Whether it is going to be by individuals or provinces. If it is going to be by the latter system, as the League would want it, then it would mean swamping of the smaller groups by the larger ones in the Punjab, Sind, N. W. F. and Baluchistan, where the number of seats are 28, 4, 3 and 1 respectively.

Arising from this, the doctor pointed out, was the other disadvantage which a province, like Assam with only 10 seats, will have to endure against another and bigger province like Bengal

with 70 seats, both of which provinces are placed in the same section. Hence, the repugnance of the Congress to the principle of grouping.

To my question "How would the Congress like it?" the doctor explained that the crux of the matter is that the League, in keeping with their insistence on division, want to go from province to the Centre in their system of constitution-making, while the Congress, standing by their creed of one nation, want the Centre to come first and then the provinces.

The idea of wanting to frame the constitution of the provinces independently of the Centre, is to perpetuate the principle of Pakistan. The Centre will remain merely a figurehead—a little like the King of England, with much fuss but no power attached to him.

"Am I to understand from what you say, doctor, that the Congress aim is to collect all power at the Centre and make the provinces the victims of their whim?"

"Not at all." The doctor sprang to the defence of the decision to which he was a party.

"Not at all," he repeated, "the Congress intention is to let the provinces ask for what they want. They will be given ample scope for the sake of appeasing the Muslims."

"Will not this affect the strength of the Centre?" I asked, appreciating the concession which the Congress were ready to make.

"It will mean a strong but limited Centre," was the answer, "a Centre which cannot be ignored by the provinces, nor a Centre which will trample on them."

"The League will, of course, fight this attempt tooth and nail," I commented.

"Oh, yes," the doctor readily agreed, and wittily added, "they are born with a fighting spirit."

I personally feel that it remains to be seen if they will be supported by the British this time, bound as they are by their Prime Minister's pledge that, if the attitude of the minorities is again recalcitrant, then the majority view shall prevail.

In the opinion of the doctor, the principal difficulty, however, would arise over the jurisdiction of the Centre over the question of finance—not subvention but sources of revenue

through taxation, customs, income-tax, tariffs, currency control, coinage, etc.

"British Government wants to retain control over all these," exclaimed the doctor, indignantly, frowning for probably the first time since we started talking an hour or more ago. "They control the currency and manipulate the exchange and dissipate the financial and industrial strength of India."

He gave me two or three glaring instances, of which one was positively scandalous. Dr. Pattabhi said that he didn't care who knew that, when Government fixed the exchange in 1927, they negotiated each vote for a price. And before I could ask, the doctor himself questioned: "And, do you know what the 'price' was? *Nautch parties*—and all that they mean! That's how they got their votes!!"

For a moment we were both silent, the doctor by the horror of the recollection and I by the awe of the revelation!

Then he continued: "Tariff is also another racket. To give you one small instance: Do you know that the tariff duty is much bigger over the tin sheets that make buckets than over readymade buckets themselves? Why? Because they do not want us to turn out any finished products ourselves but to buy and feed their consumer goods and markets."

"Why do you think they appointed the Tariff Board in such a hurry?" I didn't ask the question. The doctor himself put it and I awaited his answer.

It came: "They appointed it because they wanted a *fait accompli* before the new National Government came into being. That was their game. And, they have won it."

The doctor passed his judgment on the subject: "If I have the Centre, I must control finance. I must control coinage and currency. What they do at present is to rush the country with fresh currency—which means more crores, more expenditure over foreign goods, more wages, more sales of materials—but less goods."

*

*

*

The doctor had not, as yet, completed his list of difficulties. External Affairs was the next. War and peace were not all. What about foreign trade, immigration, laws of domicile, etc.?

Over these our Centre will have no control and over which it must, if it is to mean anything.

Treaty-making is also reserved by the British, whereby they are free to dump and maintain their troops in India, to demand the use of our aerodromes, our war bases and harbours for a certain specified period, say, of 25 years.

Then, again, there is no power for organizing the defence of the country left in the hands of the Centre. Will there be "group" armies or armies controlled by the Centre? What will be the proportion of the Hindus to the Muslims? What about the diplomatic services and so on. . . .

*

*

*

The dissecting doctor shook his head in gloom. "So you see," he concluded in a splendour of regret, "India's Centre will be *literally* powerless without and *virtually* powerless within."

20th July 1946.

CHAPTER XXXV

MASANI SEES GLOOMY FOOD FUTURE FOR INDIA

THAT India's food front may be still as tottering as the Maginot Line was in 1940 was the sum total of the impression I gathered from a talk with Minoo Masani, M.L.A. (Central) and Chairman of the People's Provincial Food Council.

Is that why the Government of India called the Food Ministers' Conference in Delhi recently? I asked the question which begged the obvious reply—Yes, of course!

And how did Government imagine that such a Conference would help to strengthen the Front, remembering that no number of conferences among French Generals six years ago helped to save the Maginot Line.

But I was making a mistake. Our Food Ministers were made of sterner stuff than the French Generals who were viti-

ated by Vichy ideas. There was no defeatist mentality among them. They met the problem manfully and most of them stood up first for their country and then for their province.

I was still not quite clear in my mind what the precise object of Government was in calling the ministers together and what it expected them to do. I asked Masani if he could throw some light upon it.

"Would it suffice," he said, "if I tell you that what was achieved at the Conference may not have been exactly what Government expected?"

What did it expect? I asked bluntly.

Masani realized that what he said obviously did not suffice. He shot to the point without any further beating around the bush. "It is difficult to resist the feeling that Government might have convened this Conference in the hope of bringing to bear some form of persuasive pressure on the ministers to impose a further cut on the present rations, that is, to reduce it to something even less than the already meagre *twelve ounces*."

In this way Government might have hoped, continued Masani, concluding his guess as to official intentions, "to meet the present food shortage and prepare for the approaching crisis."

What was the ministerial reaction to the attempt? I persisted, goading Masani still further in my own attempt to get everything out of him.

Masani did not try to parry my "thrusts", now. He met them eye to eye. To judge by the resolution they passed, the ministers would have none of it, he declared. They flatly refused to entertain any such suggestion that may have been made. As it is, 12 ozs. is a starvation ration. To cut it down further would be starvation itself.

Would you reckon this to be the worst period in India's food history?

This was a useful question as it led Masani into unfolding some interesting facts. The food situation, he said, is always grave in a country like ours where the masses of the people have, at the best of times, barely one square meal a day, where a balanced diet is unknown except to the well-to-do and where the shortage of food is normally so great that there would be no food at all for 115,000,000 of the population if the rest of the people

were provided with a normal diet.

If what you say, I commented, happens during the best of times, how much worse it must be today!

"Exactly, that is what I am coming to." And he proceeded to point out that it was necessary to distinguish between the present crisis and the normal conditions which he had just described. Today the country had struck a new low level. Drought last autumn and winter has led to a failure of crops resulting in a drop of between six to seven million tons of food-grains in addition to our normal annual deficit of 10,000,000 tons.

What will be the effect? I asked.

Masani's reply was depressing and distressing for the reason it was true. "The effect will be," he said, "that to the extent the abnormal deficit I have mentioned is not made good from overseas in the remaining months of this year, the people of India will have to starve *beyond their usual measure* and many may have to die."

Have you got any remedy to suggest?

The same, replied Masani, as the one which the Food Ministers' Conference resolved upon. As you know, far from agreeing to consider a further cut in the ration, they were unanimously and emphatically of the opinion that the Government of India should make more strenuous efforts to get as much as possible, as soon as possible, and from as many countries as possible.

Do you count on much foreign help? I asked without much hope.

Masani fortunately did not feel so hopeless. Prospects of assistance from Indonesia (Java) were now brighter. The Dutch Government had now withdrawn its ill-found objection by the pressure brought to bear upon it by the Indonesian people.

Is Java our only ally? I said, naturally not confident that its imports could amount to anything more than a mere drop in the ocean.

Well, began Masani slowly, "there is America which could help, but . . ." he hesitated.

But what? I leaned forward.

"Do you know," Masani interrogated me, "what reasons are generally given by some people in America for not doing

anything to help India?"

No, what are they? I lied to some extent but I was not prepared for what I heard.

Masani listed them for me from a letter which had been recently received in Bombay from an American who was trying to collect funds for India in the U.S.A.

- (1) *India is so far away that we aren't interested.*
- (2) *India has always had famines and always will have famines. If you save them this year, they will die next year.*
- (3) *More food means more children and just as much starvation, so why help?*
- (4) *The Indians are used to famines and because of their religion, they can starve without suffering much.*
- (5) *The Indians are inferior people and not worth helping. Sub-human masses live in India, not individuals.*
- (6) *Nothing can help the Indians until they become Christians and stop exploiting and killing each other.*
- (7) *There are fabulously rich Indians. Why don't they help their own people? Why should we give money to such a wealthy country?*
- (8) *It's Britain's job; let her do it.*
- (9) *India's starvation is not our fault. We didn't bomb India nor did the war affect her.*

Masani laughed at the end of this recital and asked me not to take them as typical of Americans in general. He has tried to clear these "misapprehensions" by an article in *The Nation* of New York, whose Editor states in a letter to Masani that the large masses of Americans are undoubtedly anxious to do what they can to help.

Is India's food future entirely dependent on imports? I asked with a view to coaxing Masani to part with a few facts about the selfishness of certain provinces.

Masani welcomed the opportunity. He revealed that some provinces in the north and the west procured only a very small proportion of their produce, that is, they did not part with the enormous surplus as a result of which deficit provinces went without any stuff and stocks.

Will the Ministers' Conference make any difference in this pernicious policy? In asking the question I was banking on the

hope that the common woe may have touched the hearts of the guilty provinces and inspired them to the virtue of team spirit and the blessings of one for all and all for one.

For once my hope was sustained. Punjab, U. P. and Bihar have agreed to go on a system of monopoly procurement and compulsory levy by which they will be obliged to distribute their surplus produce wherever necessary.

I was about to say this was heartening, when Masani nipped my enthusiasm by saying that this would only operate in the beginning of 1947 and that our province would be in net deficit of two lakhs of tons even after allowing for imports promised for the months of July, August, September and October.

Is the province making any effort to ward off the crisis?

This made an opening to the Chairman of the People's Provincial Food Council to come into his own, and to tell me about the Council's campaign to get well-to-do people to sacrifice three months of their rice or wheat ration to make provision for those who feed on nothing else.

How is it getting on? I asked.

Masani looked his disappointment. Very poorly so far, he confessed. Barely 400 citizens have shown themselves so far to be public-spirited and self-sacrificing. Among those, however, he was glad to notice there were some so richly endowed with this spirit that even the postal strike did not deter them from coming over personally to the Council's office and handing in their cards.

But, alas, sighed Masani, they were only far and few.

Whose response has been the best so far do you think?

Masani turned that question into paying a compliment to the press for their co-operation and to the Government of India for readily donating advertising space out of their allotment.

I mean which community has been the most responsive to date?

The Christians are, he replied, and added that the other larger communities should follow their example.

I asked the prime mover of this campaign how he hoped to distinguish between those who can afford to make the sacrifice and those who can't.

But Masani has all the answers. Simple enough, he sug-

gested. All the motor car owners—and there are ten thousand of these in the city; all club members—and there are a number of “posh” clubs in the city; all income-tax payers over a certain figure—all these can quite easily make this comparatively negligible sacrifice.

I will tell you one of the reasons why they do not do it so readily, I told the Chairman of the Council. Always eager to know more of what he already knows enough—Masani’s is not a deficit mind on matters of food—he waited anxiously—Yes, what is it?

They say, I said, that their servants would have nothing to eat if they parted with their rice rations as they had to feed the servants out of the family quota.

Masani smiled almost in despair. He thought that would be the reason. The servants’ excuse has been the campaign’s bugbear. But he felt it can be met by the explanation that if the majority of India’s villagers can subsist on 12 ozs. of rice, the servant class can do so as well.

There was only one reason I could think of, I said, there is no one to pamper the starving villagers. There is a whole city full of harassed housewives to pamper the servants.

Masani agreed and laughingly suggested that the housewives can take their solicitude a little further by paying them a little more so they could buy vegetables, fish, meat and milk.

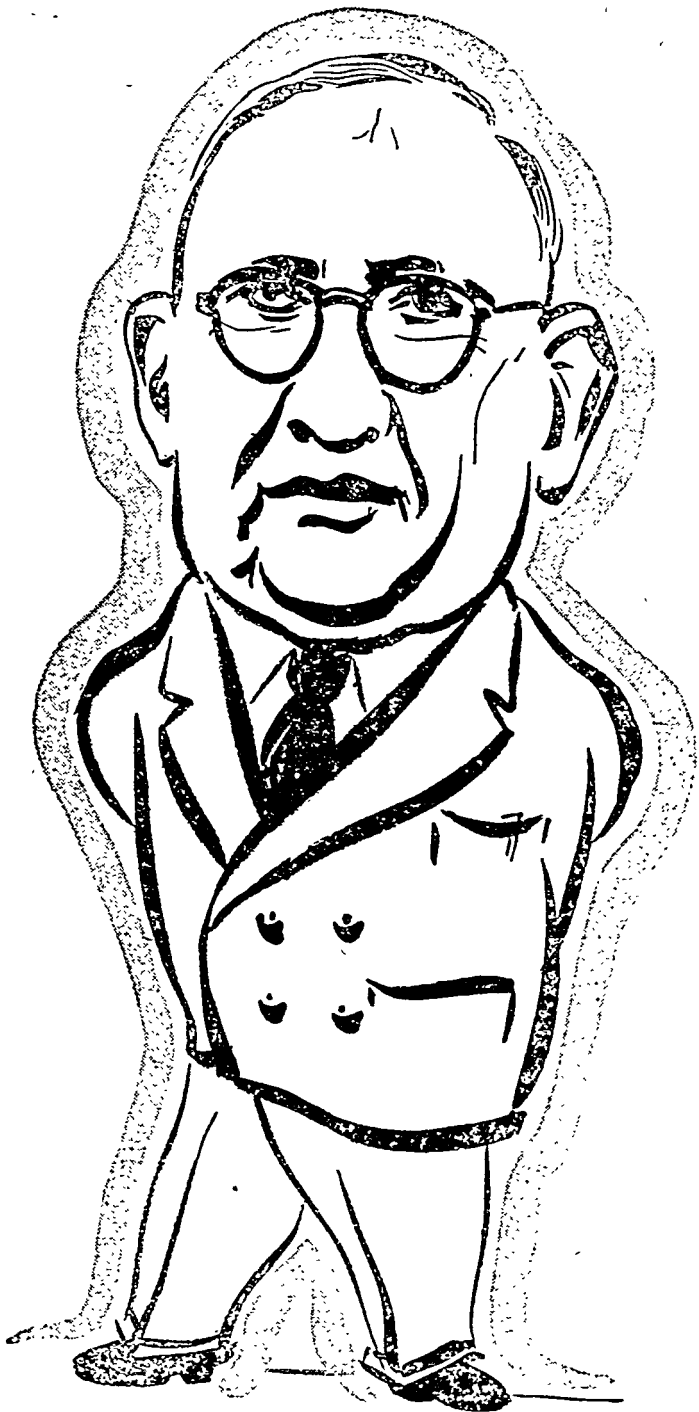
That would be *really* the milk of human kindness!

31st August 1946.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHUNDRIGAR WANTS EQUALITY WITH CONGRESS AS BASIS OF CO-OPERATION

UNREST is writ large on the face of India, just at a time when we thought unrest was going to end for ever and a new era of peace and prosperity, borne on the wings of free-



I. I. Chundrigar — Equality — damn equity

dom, would be introduced in a land which has suffered so much to deserve it.

We breathed a sigh of relief when the national ministries came into power. We thought it was the prelude to self-reliance. It was the beginning of self-abuse—strikes.

We hoped afresh when the National Government came into power at the Centre. We thought—here was the Great Freedom at last. We were mistaken. There was the Great Calcutta Killing, and its influence all over the country.

We prayed that if the League's omission was the cause of it, its inclusion would be the end of it. Our spirits rose as Jinnah's entry at long last was announced. Now indeed or never! Now the stabbings in Bombay and elsewhere would cease, the feeling of insecurity would disappear, we would no longer see snakes and scorpions round the corner, that indeed we would recognize in them only our brothers and sisters.

We wished, we felt, we believed, all this was coming. What came? What was in store for us? The shock of shocks—NOAKHALI, CHANDPUR, TIPPERAH.

Indeed we have nothing left on which to build the castle of our hopes for peace and harmony harnessed to the freedom which was our heartfelt desire. All our castles hitherto have turned out to be "airy nothings." Distress and disillusionment have been our sole reward.

There must be some explanation, some reason, some remedy. Mutual mud-slinging between the Congress and the League is not going to get the country anywhere and it is futile, indeed harmful to draw inferences, however natural they may be. It is best to study to be silent and resist such impulses at a time when only determined constructive effort can help.

Repeatedly I have gone in search of a solution to Congress leaders and published their views. They have always shown the keenest aptitude for a communal settlement which would end this shocking career of events when a brother seeks a brother's blood instead of his love.

I was lying in wait for a Muslim League leader—what he would have to say. My opportunity came in the short time between the news of Mr. I. I. Chundrigar's appointment to the

Interim Government and the Hon'ble Member's departure to Delhi.

"Do you think we are any the less anxious for a settlement?" he barked as soon as I had revealed the purpose of my visit.

He answered the question himself, "I assure you, we want it as much as anyone else."

"Then what is keeping you?" I wondered.

"But," Mr. Chundrigar continued, ignoring my question but answering it incidentally, "we want an honourable settlement or agreement based on equality with the Congress. We are prepared to co-operate with them as friends not as followers?"

"Haven't they always approached as friends?" I risked, remembering the repeated efforts of the Congress to seek the co-operation of the League, so much indeed that even the British, usually so much inclined towards the League, had turned in exasperation to the Congress.

But Mr. Chundrigar retorted, "Yes, they approached us as friends and offered us the hand of friendship, *but on their terms.*"

"How can you say that?" I asked and continued, "Nehru was most anxious to have you enter the Interim Government with him and still you chose to go with the Viceroy on the same terms?"

"They were not the same terms," said Mr. Chundrigar shortly.

"What was the difference?" I asked again. "You got all the five seats which you were insisting upon, didn't you? What more did you want?"

"We got the five seats, that's true," replied the Hon'ble Member, "but (and it is the biggest 'but'!), the Congress insisted on retaining their one Nationalist Muslim."

"That, I suppose, is *the difference*?" I anticipated.

"That is the difference," he confirmed quietly.

"Does it follow, Mr. Chundrigar," I followed up, "that you want to dub the Congress a Hindu body that you wish to deprive them of the Nationalist Muslim?"

I thought Chundrigar would promptly say, "What else are they if not a practically purely Hindu organization?"

Instead, to my surprise, he answered, "No, we don't want

to dub them a Hindu body, but we do not want them to cause a split between us, by popping up a Muslim who is opposed to the League and then saying that the Muslims are divided."

I did not think that Congress intention was so much what Mr. Chundrigar alleged, as it was a safeguard for their national character. But Mr. Chundrigar promptly retorted that Gandhiji did the same thing during the Round Table Conference by putting up Dr. Ansari and saying there were two parties.

This was leading nowhere. So I said, "By coming in with the Viceroy it has not helped you to get rid of the Nationalist Muslim from the ranks of the Congress. So how did it help your not accepting Nehru's offer?"

"There are other reasons which will be revealed in course of time," replied Mr. Chundrigar cautiously, "suffice it to say for the time being that Pandit Nehru may not have accepted our inclusion of a Depressed Class member in our quota."

This led to a fresh venue of discussion. I told Mr. Chundrigar that I believed, as everybody else did, that the Muslim League by both its constitution and its function was a purely communal body. Then how could it include a non-Muslim as a member of its Government?

Mr. Chundrigar explained that though what I had said was true, the constitution of the League provided for certain exemptions by exercising which even a person under eighteen could be admitted into Government as well as those who were not Muslims. Ordinarily this was not done but in special cases the Provincial Muslim League Committees and the Muslim League Working Committee had a right to resort to the exemptions.

"Why did you think it necessary to make use of the exemption on this occasion?" I asked. "Wouldn't it seem that the League was trying to cause a split in the ranks of the Depressed Classes just as he, Mr. Chundrigar, suggested that the Congress were trying to do the same in the League legions by including a Nationalist Muslim in their number?"

"It is true," replied Mr. Chundrigar, "that we also want to show the Congress that Depressed Classes are not satisfied with the Congress treatment, but our principal aim is to prove that the Muslim League is not selfish and does not overlook the interests of the minorities."

I interpreted this as an attempt by the Muslim League to win over the confidence of the minorities.

I realized I was not altogether wrong as I heard Mr. Chundrigar continue: "The minorities are welcome to go with the Congress if they want to, if they are convinced they should—the League is not standing in their way—but I believe that they are all turning to the Congress out of a feeling of frustration?"

"A feeling of frustration, Mr. Chundrigar!" I exclaimed, "I do not understand."

"Yes, a feeling of frustration because the minorities believe that the Congress is the only organization which can offer them jobs in the administration, seats in the legislature, ministerships in the provinces, appointments in government."

"Well," I put in, "they *are* looking after the interests of the minorities."

I knew there would be a difference of opinion on that score, but Mr. Chundrigar glossed over it and said that the minorities turn to the Congress for these alleged advantages even if they do not agree with the Congress attitude or point of view, because they feel there is no other way they can take.

I didn't agree with Mr. Chundrigar but curiosity led me to ask, "Then what should the minorities do?"

Mr. Chundrigar said, "The government of a free country can only work on a basis of co-operation and goodwill and these are not possible unless the rights of the minorities are defended."

"And how can they be defended?"

"By the minorities themselves," was the answer, "let them set up organizations after the pattern of the Muslim League and fight the Congress for their rights."

I thought it was rather a queer way of co-operation—fighting and dividing into groups, but as I knew what Mr. Chundrigar meant—that the minorities should not allow themselves to be swept aside by the imperious will, dictated by their majority of the Congress—I knew there would be no point—in making the point.

I concluded by hoping that co-operation and understanding would be reached between the Congress and the League as in the course of administration they find themselves agreeing with each

other on vital issues.

For instance, in matters of foreign policy, as laid down by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru recently, Mr. Jinnah should readily acquiesce as it affects and is in the interests of the entire country equally without distinction of benefit to any one caste or community.

Again on the South African question, the League cannot possibly take up any other stand to the one taken by the Congress and the country, namely, that of unequivocal condemnation of the treatment meted out to Indians in that land.

Yet again there can be no Congress-League differences on the food question and policy. And so on and so forth on several other matters pertaining to the welfare of the country and aimed at building up India into a first class world power.

We hope that the strength of such agreements will weaken the bone of contention and foster the bonds of understanding between the two parties which hold the destiny of millions in their hands.

26th October 1946.

CHAPTER XXXVII

K. M. MUNSHI ON CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

STORY OF TWO CAPRICIOUS GIRLS AND AN UNRELIABLE HUSBAND

WE can't always go on offering the other cheek, began Mr. Munshi spiritedly, as we sat down to discuss the prospects of the Constituent Assembly.

He caressed his cheek which seemed to have been lately stung. It looked red with temper.

How can we advance to freedom if our every move is check-mated, he asked using the chess player's terminology.

By whom ? I asked in my turn hoping to find out if he would shirk making a direct hit.

But the shrewd lawyer-politician of over 40 years' standing was too clever for me !

That is obvious, he replied. The Congress and the Muslim League accepted the Cabinet proposals as a basis of co-operation.

The British Cabinet Mission proposed to two very capricious women ! I joked.

Yes, said Munshi carrying it on a little further, but the husband himself was none too reliable. It reminded me of the phrase he had once used, "A marriage of inconvenience."

However inconvenient it may be, it had to be tolerated and we proceeded to discuss the aspects of the "marriage". There were two. The long and short of it. Except that the short comes first. The Interim Government. Then the "long" whose first step was the Constituent Assembly.

After a great deal of "lovers' quarrels", the marriage ceremony was at last performed. The Interim Government was formed. The husband, the British, thought that by throwing in the two highly-strung girls together they would eventually get tired of pulling each other's hair out, and agreed to live in peace.

We even hoped that the two would come to like each other so much in course of time that they would both jointly want to divorce their husband. One of them we know was most anxious to do it and actually conceded a number of compromises to satiate the desires of the other competitor.

Mr. Munshi pointed out the biggest compromise. The Cabinet Mission's pivot, he said, was one Union with a common Centre restricted to four subjects, Defence, External Affairs, etc. The Congress accepted this limited Centre only as a matter of compromise and in the hope of securing the co-operation of the Muslim League.

For a moment—alas, for all too brief a moment, reminding one of Macbeth's "Out, out brief candle"—it looked hopeful. The Muslim League pledged itself to the long-term plan and entered the Interim Government.

But now that the time for taking the first step of the long-term plan is at hand, namely, the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, the Muslim League is trying to slip out of its obligation.

Mr. Munshi looked indignant. It is not cricket, he said, it is a breach of faith.

What about Mr. Jinnah's complaint against the Congress that they had not accepted the long-term plan as it stood? I asked.

That is not correct, clarified the Congress leader. *Congress has accepted the plan as it stands but has reserved the freedom to get it construed by the Federal Court.*

Then what is Jinnah's objection?

He objects to the Congress condition of consulting the Federal Court for the interpretation of the plan.

What interpretation does he want? I persisted.

He does not want the Congress to interpret the terms in one of the several meanings to which the State Paper is open. He wants the interpretation put on it by Pethick-Lawrence to be accepted.

If he is so sure it is correct, then why should he fear the decision of the Federal Court?

Mr. Munshi had been replying patiently to my questions up to this point, but now he could stand it no longer. I wondered how he had stood it so long.

Look, Taleyarkhan, he began, any number of reasons may be invented by the League for turning down the long-term plan and impeding the Constituent Assembly. But the real reason is only one. Pakistan!

But the State Paper . . . I started.

Yes, the State Paper buried Pakistan, interrupted Munshi irresistibly. The Muslim League agreed to the alternative. And now it wants to revive it. It is simply impossible to achieve. But simple to understand.

But then why did they agree in the first place?

In order to get into the Interim Government—in the first place, answered Munshi in cut-and-dried fashion. No harm in saying “yes, yes” to everything and every condition when you want something done immediately. Having got the thing, they care a tuppence for what they agreed to—to get it.

Pie-crust promises! commented Munshi with a mingling of agitation and despair. What else, he continued. One Constituent Assembly and one Union Centre are the essentials of

the whole plan. If both are sabotaged, nothing is left.

But, I said, to prolong the agony of the argument, Jinnah does not categorically turn down the Constituent Assembly. He says it should be postponed till such time when peaceful conditions are restored in the country.

In reply, Munshi asked a significant question : Do you think they will be restored—or will they be allowed to be restored ?

What is your feeling of Wavell's attitude ? I asked, remembering that so far in our talk we had ignored one of the principal figures in the macabre drama.

Difficult to say, replied Munshi after a pause. But if—and I am prepared to admit it is a big “if”—Wavell plays into the hands of the Muslim League. . . .

Before he could proceed further, I asked, “In what way ?”

By allowing them to remain in the Interim Government in spite of not participating in the Constituent Assembly.

Then what would the Congress do ?

The Congress would conduct the Constituent Assembly, frame a constitution and insist on its implementing by the British Government in terms of their proposals.

And if they don't ? If they refuse ?

Well, I suppose, revealed the legal maestro, Congress would set up a provisional government and declare India's independence forthright.

Before I could say that this is much easier said than done, Munshi hastened to add that he felt sure that His Majesty's Government would not commit a breach of faith and allow it to come to that pass.

You mean Wavell will see to it ? I chanced.

I don't know, said Munshi cautiously, but I am inclined to feel that Wavell's natural sympathies are against the Congress.

Then why did he ask Pandit Nehru to form the Interim Government ?

What makes you so sure he asked ? He might have been *told* to ask.

By the British Cabinet ?

Yes, by the British Cabinet.

Then you have faith in the present Labour Government of Great Britain ?

I have faith in their policy, asserted Mr. Munshi. The impression among Congress leaders as revealed by the Meerut session is that Wavell is not playing quite fair. If that is so, then his views are not in tune with those of the Labour Government.

But he is a servant of his Government ? How can he dissemble their intentions ?

That is for the British Government to find out, concluded Mr. Munshi, and if they do, it is their duty to replace him by a British agent who is able to carry out the policy and instructions of the Labour Cabinet.

It was well deep into the night by now. Mr. Munshi yawned. The sixty year old diplomat was tired both by his day's work and by my volley of questions. I realized I must stop it. He had not wilted. He had willed. And in that will I saw the determination of the people not to rest till they could call their country their own, every part of it belonging to one and all.

30th November 1946.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PEOPLE WILL RULE BUT PRINCES WILL STAY SHANKERRAO'S SOLUTION FOR STATES' PROBLEM

SHANKERRAO DEO, the diminutive-looking Congress leader, who covers himself with just a thin sheet of khaddar even in the cold of Delhi during winter and every now and then exposes his chest for an airing, is a keen sympathiser—mind you, not supporter—of the States.

He is not as forthright as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya who wants to do away with the States virtually, lock, stock and barrel.

He wants to give them breathing time. He does not want to do a high jump of surprise on them lest he lose his balance.

He has the greatest feeling for the people but he fears that even those people would get a nasty jolt if they were told

tomorrow that they were no longer residing in a State and that they must alter all their ways and habits.

However oppressed they be the transition must be gradual, not sudden, in order to allow its effects to be appreciated to the full by them.

"Will that mean," I asked, "that the States will not be urged to join the Union rightaway and aren't you keen that they should?"

"Of course I am keen and everything will be done to urge them to join," he replied promptly.

"Then how can you advocate their existence?" I persisted.

"Because," he felt, "you cannot destroy anything overnight. The States have existed for generations and a stroke of the pen is not going to abolish them, however powerful the pen."

"With the States I suppose the Princes and Co. also remain?"

"Naturally," rejoined Shankerrao. "You cannot just ask them to quit. They are very powerful some of them and very wealthy most of them. They can be very useful."

The vein of the leader's logic was quite plain. I knew that if this vein were cut, it would not bleed the States to death. In fact it would be a bankruptcy of wisdom on the part of our leaders.

Still, Shankerrao Deo's reference to the Princes' possible utility led me to remark, "You do believe that people in some of the States are badly oppressed and that they are looking up to the National Government to redeem their lot?"

"Of course I do," he said quickly, "and the Union Centre will do everything in its power to see that their treatment improves."

My next question followed as a matter of course. "How?"

"The Princes will remain but they will be shorn of their power."

"Who will shear their pompous wool of power?" I asked in mocking pompousness.

"The people," answered Shri Shankerrao simply and shortly.

I was surprised. I couldn't imagine these long oppressed, gutless, nerve-stricken people, inflicted with inertia, telling their

princely rulers, "Look, from now on we are going to tell you what to do. See?"

I didn't. So I murmured weakly, unbelievably, "The people?"

"Yes," Shankerrao Deo repeated deliberately, "the people."

"But how?"

"There will be a transfer of power from the Princes to the people," he explained.

"Who will enforce that transfer?" I asked suspiciously—and looked very much like a doubting Thomas.

"The Union Centre," he answered patiently.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "how does the Union Centre come in." This is the first time he had mentioned it.

Used to answering many questions, silly and intelligent, the Congress Secretary did not mind mine.

"The States will be asked to join the Union Centre."

"Do you think they will?"

"I think they will," he replied readily and with conviction born of long contact with the States.

But I wanted everything cut and dried. I asked, "Why?"

"Because the States and the Princes know that their salvation lies in joining the Union. They are after all Indian," he said.

"And they know on what side their bread is buttered," I added.

"Exactly," observed Shankerrao, "the Princes know that it won't do them any good being tacked on to the British now."

"Because their days are numbered?" I commented.

I must have sounded ambiguous for Shankerrao Deo clarified cautiously, "If you mean those of the British, yes!" he said.

I did and now we had it quite clear why it would be more expedient for the States to fall in line with the Union.

But I did not quite see how the connection between the Union and the States was to be brought about.

So I asked, "how will these States join the Union if they do?"

"That depends on the size of the States," Shankerrao explained, "they can join singly as individuals or group them-

selves up and join collectively."

"You mean," I asked, "that the bigger States could join the Union on their own and the smaller ones could get together and federate themselves into one unit. Is that so?"

"Quite," rejoined Shri Deo, quite pleased over the fact that light was at last dawning upon me. "Some of the States," he added, "are as big as some of our bigger provinces. These can enter the Union separately, while the smaller ones which are too small to enter on their own may form their own units and enter their group as one unit in the Union."

"Will these units or groups of States be autonomous?"

"Yes, in the same sense as the provinces in the various sections."

"That is, they will have constitutions of their own. Am I right?" I asked.

"Yes," Shankerrao agreed, "but with the difference that these constitutions will be framed by constituent assemblies of the people of the States, *not* the Princes."

"In other words it will be an elected assembly that will frame the constitution of the particular group of States?" I commented.

"Correct," replied the tormented one "they will be assemblies elected by the people."

"And after these constitutions are framed, who will be empowered to see that they are acted up to the letter and in the spirit?"

"There will be a complete transfer of power as I told you," repeated Mr. Shankerrao with admirable fortitude of patience.

"Won't the Princes, having ruled so long, be loath to part with their power even after the new constitution is framed?" I questioned.

"So many think that way," admitted Mr. Deo. "But I don't. And I can give you the instance of the Deccan States whose rulers have already agreed to a complete transfer of power to the people. Why shouldn't the rest?"

"Suppose they don't?"

"Then there is only one remedy," said Shankerrao, almost resigned, not to the inevitable—he does not believe it is inevitable—but to my relentless probings.

"And what is that?"

"The remedy of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya," said Shankerrao smiling and nodding at the doctor who was sitting nearby us.

He was probably overhearing our talk because before I could ask again, "what is it?" his dogmatic voice rang out, "REVOLT. Let the States' people revolt. That's the only solution."

The non-violent Shankerrao Deo shuddered. It was very cold, that day. But it was not the cold that made the thinly-clad Shankerrao shudder.

It was the heat of the Congress historian's utterance that did!

11th January 1947.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BETWEEN THE INEVITABLE AND THE INDOMITABLE: A.I.C.C. RESOLUTION VS. THE "RESOLUTION" OF GOPINATH BARDOLOI

GOPINATH BARDOLOI is bottled up.

His heart is bleeding but his mouth is shut.

It is bleeding for Assam, the land where he was born and bred, where he learned his first lessons of patriotism, where he tasted the first fruits of freedom, where he felt the first bitterness of disillusionment and the first impact with the struggle that is life.

He became so absorbed by the great history of Assam that he began to make himself a part of it—till today he is also a parcel of it.

Already twice prime minister of the province, Gopinath Bardoloi is one of the stoutest champions of its liberty. But he is also a soldier of the Congress and so well trained at that, that he never opens his mouth where he fears he may put his foot into it.

Not any lack of courage but every consideration of discipline has made him yield his passion for liberty to the service of loyalty. But a time may come when the breaking point of his patience may be reached and then he will give his pent-up feelings a real break.

But as yet he is clasping the dandelion of hope with an expression of deep sadness on his face. He looks heavy with worry and forebodings. There is a mental tussle in his mind between the inevitable and the indomitable—the inevitable career of events and the indomitable power of his will.

"They can't do it! They can't do it!" he kept on repeating in futile indignation. "They cannot thrust on us a constitution my people do not want."

That led to the opening scene. The curtain was being lifted. Bardoloi was opening his mouth—only to find his heart inside it, literally as it were.

"The Congress have accepted the British Statement of December Sixth," he began heavily. He heaved in pain.

"That was a gesture of magnanimity," I commented, "which the Muslim League should promptly appreciate."

"That is another question—and also a big question," Bardoloi said impatiently, "but what about Assam? Do you know what it is going to mean to Assam?"

I had some idea, but I said, "No, what?"

He paused, wondering how much to say and what not to say—that instinct of loyalty was still uppermost in his mind.

At last slowly and in deadly earnest, he said, "IT WILL MEAN OUR DEATH, Taleyarkhan."

"Your death!" I looked at Bardoloi blankly. "I do not understand."

The Assam Premier took pains to make me understand. "Acceptance of December Sixth means Grouping."

I knew what was coming—trooping out of Assam's independence. But I waited to hear how Assam's leader would put it. This is how he did. It was vehement.

"Grouping means crushing by brute majority. It means stampeding of our most elementary human rights." Mr. Bardoloi obviously meant the right of framing its own constitution, making its own laws, governing itself.

"Do you mean to tell me that the Congress did not realize this and appreciate your feelings at the time of deciding to accept the statement of December Sixth?" I asked.

Bardoloi shrugged his shoulders as he said, "The Congress should have, because this looks as if they have sacrificed their principles."

"What principles?"

"The principles of cultural and linguistic units and provincial autonomy."

"But," I pointed out, "the Congress resolution has left the door open for you."

"If you mean its last paragraph," Mr. Bardoloi rejoined. The last paragraph of the resolution has stated that it would not force any province to accept any constitution which it does not want to.

"That is what I am banking on," Assam's champion continued. So that was the saving grace of the resolution, that last dandelion of hope to which Assam was clinging.

"Then what are you worried about?" I asked bluntly.

"What am I worried about!" Bardoloi exclaimed in surprise, "why, man, the resolution favours the principle of grouping. That means once we go into sections, we'll have to go into groups—and that means we'll be at the mercy of the Muslim League."

"In that case," I asked, "what is the value of the last paragraph of the resolution?"

Bardoloi shrugged his massive shoulders for the second time. "It is most confusing," he said. Indirectly he had condemned the ambiguity of the resolution. But he added somewhat hopefully, "But I am going to take them at their word—literally if necessary."

"At any rate, you have the option to opt out," I suggested.

"So it is said, but whether it can be *done* is more than I can say." Bardoloi sounded hopeless about the chances of opting out.

So I persisted, "Why wouldn't you be able to opt out if you do not find the constitution agreeable?"

"It would be most difficult," exclaimed Bardoloi. "The opting out can only be done after the elections have taken place."

I was still puzzled. "How would that prevent you from opting out?"

"Because the elections will take place according to the new constitution framed by the group in which Assam will be in a minority." (Out of Bengal's 60 votes, 38 are Muslim League, leaving Congress with 23, while in Assam Congress has only seven votes, which gives the League a clear majority of eight votes to legislate as it pleases.)

"But you may not accept that constitution," I commented.

"Once we accept grouping, it means we sit side by side with the Muslim League and we become a part and parcel of the constitution that is figured out. This constitution may make it so difficult for a minority province to opt out, that it will be virtually impossible."

"Why do you presume the Muslims will make it so hard, why do you even presuppose that they will not co-operate with you in framing the constitution and look to your interests as well?"

This question made Bardoloi sit bolt upright. He was looking for an opportunity to give his reasons for his premonitions about the outcome of grouping.

"In the first place," he began, "I must make it clear that I cannot help regarding the Muslims as my brothers."

"That should clear much of the way," I put in hopefully.

"Yes," Bardoloi retorted, "if only they did so as well."

"Why do you think they don't?"

"My experience with them tells me that."

"What experience in particular?" I asked, closing in.

"One instance will suffice," the defender of Assam's rights began, "the question of population. *Do you know that by the 1931 census, the Hindus were fifty-six lakhs. . . . And do you know how many there are today?*"

"Oh," I said casually, "I suppose, ten or twenty thousand more." I based my calculation on the natural fact that as the years pass, the country develops and its population grows.

Bardoloi smiled. "So everybody would think," he rejoined, and then warmed up almost to shout, "*but in fact today there are only thirty-two lakhs of Hindus in Assam. Would you believe it?*"

"No," I exclaimed automatically. It was really incredible. Yet it was true.

"But how can it happen?" I looked askance.

"All these years, they have been trying to make out that the tribal people who have been pure Hindus for generations cannot be reckoned as Hindus and one after another they severed hundreds of tribes with their total population from the Hindu community of Assam."

"How did it help the Muslims?"

"It reduced the Hindu electorate," Bardoloi explained and hastened to add, "don't forget, Taleyarkhan, so much just by propaganda. Just imagine our fate when they have their own constitution and have power in their hand. So now, perhaps, you realize what the acceptance of December Sixth statement will mean to us. So now, perhaps you appreciate why there is such intensity of feeling against it in Assam?"

Bardoloi's heart was bleeding. But I was relentless. "You seem to be thinking only of Hindu Assam. Don't forget there are 3½ million Muslims too."

The Assam Premier stoutly defended his treatment of Assam Muslims. "If it is a crime to treat the Muslims with every consideration and every concession, then I am indeed guilty of it."

Mr. Bardoloi added significantly, "*the majority of the Muslims will not have a word to say against our treatment of their rights and interests and feelings and so many of them are not in favour of grouping, but as you know they dare not say it.*"

"Why should they be against grouping when it is in their own interest?"

"Because Bengal which is a deficit province will be benefited by the grouping. The League's motive is clear—to feed Bengal at the expense of Assam."

"But Assam is a surplus province," I mentioned.

Bardoloi laughed bitterly. "Believe me, it is so much minus by the time everything is taken out of it that it has hardly enough to keep skin and bone together."

This led the Prime Minister to the question of Assam's revenue. "We are allowed a measly thirty lakhs by the Central

Government."

"Isn't it sufficient?" I asked in ignorance.

"Sufficient!" he gasped. "Why do you think we have no university, no high court, no engineering college, no industries when we have all the natural facilities of developing into a very prosperous province?"

"You should try and produce more revenue," I suggested.

"It is not a question of our producing more. It is a matter of our being allowed to use what is our own. Everything is taken from us. Only this is left. If we were left to our resources, if our resources were left intact, we would ask for nothing more. But we are squeezed. Life is squeezed out of us."

It was a passionate outpouring. Again I saw Bardoloi's heart bleeding.

But he continued emotionally but vigorously: "If we were allowed to mind our own business, we have the power to be independent and prosperous both politically and economically. For generations, the Assamese have been a free people, a proud people, with a heritage of courage and culture. Hindus and Muslims have lived side by side and fought side by side for the independence of Assam for centuries." Bardoloi sketched Assam's history. It was proud. He was proud of it.

But it gave me the impression that Bardoloi did not regard Assam as a province at all but as a nation within its own right. I said: "You blame the Muslims for their two-nation theory. You sound as if you also want a nation of your own."

Bardoloi promptly corrected me. "I want a province of my own. My nation is India. I am ready to join the Union Centre. Outside it I shall be autonomous and no forces in the world will dictate selfish and greedy terms to me." He sounded supremely resolute.

And as I rose to take my leave, I felt that no A.-I.C.C. resolution was going to shake this Gopinath Bardoloi resolution!

IMPRESSIONS AND "NON-INDIGENOUS" INTERVIEWS

CHAPTER XL

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR—AN IMPRESSION

EVERYBODY is making plans these days. The Hon. Labour Member to the Government of India, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, had just declared his. So I went along to find out what it was like.

When in Bombay, the honourable member puts up in a railway compartment at the Central Station and passes most of his time spending his Johnsonian wit—incidentally he has read a lot of Boswell, "an ideal bedside book" in his opinion—on the various people who come to see him during the day. Having a robust sense of humour, he laughs the loudest at his own jokes and cracks, whether with a view to drown the retort of his victim or out of genuine self-appreciation, I do not know.

When his secretary introduced me saying I had come for his political opinions the doctor was quite surprised. I do not know of six people who are interested in my political views, he said. At the end of my talk I was surprised how there were even six! However, I was immediately sympathetic and offered him the platform of the Progressive Group—but his arrogance borne of much embitterment in life, came speedily to his rescue.

What, he exclaimed, speak to the Progressive Group—that place of amusement and entertainment?

This was too much too suddenly and I said quickly, before he could develop his laughter to the deafening degree—No, doctor, not as a rule. The Group is usually a place of enlightenment and instruction. But we do have amusement and entertainment occasionally and since we haven't had it for some time now, we wouldn't mind having you.

There is one redeeming quality about the doctor. If he can give it hard, he can also take it well.



Dr. B. R. Ambedkar—Ready to Spring.....a Satire

Throughout the time I was there, much as I must admit I enjoyed his talk, I couldn't help noticing that constant attempt to be too clever, always wanting to have a crack at somebody or other all the time, followed by his cackle—till by the time I left him a perfect pattern of a frustrated man had formed itself in my mind.

After all, as Stephen Harvey has said:

*There's a lust in man no charm can tame
Of loudly publishing our neighbour's shame;
On eagle's wings immortal satires fly,
While virtuous actions are but born and die.*

Apparently Executive Councillors do not escape the application of the verse to themselves! It is a pity really in the case of the Doctor, a giant not only physically, but even intellectually. He may have had sufficient cause to be embittered once, but now that he has attained this eminent position, he should rise above it.

Dr. Ambedkar's anxiety for the welfare of his own class is certainly much to be admired, but it is taken to such an extremist degree, it is so thickly coated with the paint of bias and prejudice for everyone else, that the propagation of his ideas is more harmful to the cause of his community—left alone his country, which has apparently never mattered to him—than conducive to its promotion.

CHAPTER XLI

BEVERLEY NICHOLS—A DECEPTION

TALKING of Dr. Ambedkar must of necessity remind me of Beverley Nichols who called him one of the six best brains of India.

The name of Beverley Nichols has left such a bad taste in the Indian mouth that I am most reluctant to own that I was among the first to know him in Bombay and stand up for him

against a multitude of opposition which though it was fully justified subsequently did not strike me as being reasonable at the time.

I must admit I was rather taken in by the opportunity of knowing a man who can conjure up so much fame on the strength—or rather the weakness—of his foot alone. I wonder how many will recollect his letter to the *Times of India* explaining away the mystery attached to him, during the earlier part of his stay in India.

In the last para of that letter, he said. "If anybody continues to suggest that there is anything mysterious about my behaviour to date, I can only point to my bandages and make the almost too obvious reply—'my foot'."

In a prior letter to me he had described his woeful tale as a badly messed up foot which he had a feeling was the result of some military doctors regarding it as a medium for learning elemental strategy.

Besides being original in the sense of humour which has perhaps given him his literary fame, I found him at the time so congenial, charming and unaffected, so genuinely steeped in his sympathy for India and her cause, that I simply could not believe the amazing transformation that came over his attitude in the latest stages of his stay in India.

I had hoped at the time of the Progressive Group meeting he addressed on 5th May, 1943, that he would not turn out to be another one of those half-baked writers who gather their impression of India travelling in styles de luxe, staying in hotels de luxe and sipping glasses of cocktail and champagne—de luxe.

Everybody knows how he let down those hopes and degraded himself into writing some of the most atrocious libels on India. If he didn't collect his impressions of our country in hotels de luxe and such like places, the only other place I can think of where he could have, is the maternity ward of a hospital in Peshawar where he appears to have spent a large proportion of his time in India—nursing that foot of his.

Even before he left India, he started talking some errant and arrogant nonsense about Indian art and culture. He capped his performance by writing his *Verdict on India*—to complete his testimony of frustration and bitterness.

Though he holds us, the Parsis, in comparatively high admiration and has actually given us the credit of being outstanding in India, I would not be an Indian if I applaud him on that account.

Indeed after reading this book, I concluded that there was something wrong not only with the foot of Mr. Nichols. There must be something wrong with him *from head to foot*. For if India is "a vast desert of mediocrity," Mr. Beverley Nichols is surely a much vaster desert of ignorance.

CHAPTER XLII

EDGAR SNOW'S FEARS AND FAITH FOR INDIA

I MET Edgar Snow when he was in Bombay in August 1942. The famous author of *Red Star Over China* and no less famous American "scooper" of news, is a thoroughly charming person. He immediately took me to his room, forgot all about the fact that he had told his other guests he would be back in five minutes and chatted with me for over an hour.

Edgar Snow loves discussions, hates speeches. He is the most interestingly inquisitive man I have met. He asked me all sorts of questions to which he knew the answers thoroughly well. He was constantly fiddling with a pencil, jotted a word down now and again and resumed his volley of questions.

But when he wanted to talk, it was impossible putting in a word even sideways—he would just carry on—no matter what I tried to say. I did not want to say much when he was talking anyway.

He was reticent about his movements, but perfectly open about his views. Jawaharlal Nehru, he thought, was a fine man, very intellectual with a very keen mind, but he lacked, Edgar Snow found, some of the ingredients of leadership. He did not have that overpowering confidence in his own conviction. Frankly, Snow thinks that Jawaharlal Nehru does not believe

in the methods of Gandhi, but he subscribes to them because he thinks it is the only possible way to keep his hold on the public. He shifts his ground at times to an alarming extent.

Of India's future, Snow believes that the country can never be wholly conquered though the vital danger to it is being decided now in the Caucasus. If the Germans break through there, India will really have to harden herself not only to the prospect but the reality of an invasion.

He thought nothing of the Germans in Egypt. They do not want Egypt. They are merely diverting the attention of the Allies from Russia. They do not want effective help being passed on to the Russians. So this is just a stunt, which is proved by the fact that Rommel has been allotted only two divisions while eighty are battling in Russia.

No, India has nothing much to fear from that direction. Nor from the Japanese imminently. Because the Japanese are not powerful enough to launch a wholesale invasion at the moment. Besides they are not keen on the whole of the country. They are only after certain productive points.

Yes, the real danger of an invasion of India lies from the Caucasus. And yet Snow the Strange thinks that an invasion would be after all the best thing that can happen to India.

Man alive, why? I exclaimed in amazement.

Because at the moment India does not know what she wants. She cannot hit upon decisively on any new order. British imperialism on the one hand and Gandhism on the other are both decaying institutions. But decaying though both of them are, nothing new or formidable has emerged to replace the one or the other.

India is at sea now. But India would be *under* the sea if both of them went. Hence the necessity of an invasion. *It will bring out the best in the Indians.* It will give forcible occasion for founding a brand new order.

But, Mr. Snow, what about the sanguinary price the country and her people will have to pay? I commented.

There is no other way. Take—or leave it (if you can) and leaving it endure the clash of the existing conditions.

What about Amery?

Amery must go, Snow agreed, he is the thorn.

What about Churchill?

Churchill cannot be turned out for little India's sake when the fate of world freedom is depending on his grit and tenacity. India should have accepted Cripps' offer. It would have been a stepping stone for further demands. India complains Britain does not keep her promises. India does not give Britain a chance to.

Some such strong-willed man like Wendell Wilkie should be brought out to India to bring about a lasting amicable settlement by thorough negotiations. But Snow wondered how the Americans could take an interest in India unless the country was turned over to them as a gift. He wondered how the Americans would want to fight for India when the Indians themselves do not care to.

That is what happened in Burma. Ask the average English soldier about the failure in Burma and he will say he did not know whom he was fighting. The enemy behind him was more devastating than the enemy in front of him. He means that it was not the Japs who got him but the very people, the Burmese, whom he was fighting for. They stabbed him in the back while he was defending himself in the front.

We could have talked the whole evening away, had his memory, reminding him of another engagement, not stepped in between.

2nd August 1942.

CHAPTER XLIII

HOWARD DONOVAN PAYS LAST TRIBUTE TO FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

HOWARD DONOVAN, American Consul in Bombay, is not the man of the moment. He asked me to make that clear at the outset. President Roosevelt is, although he is dead. President Truman is—his living prototype. But not me; no, not me! Donovan made me get that clear.

I got it. But you are their representative in this country, Mr. Donovan?

That's so. No doubt about that. But what about it?

Oh, only this. What did you think of your President?

The world's opinion is mine. There can be no other.

This was the pithiest compliment I had heard paid to the pluckiest of America's Presidents.

Now let's hear, I thought, what the Consul had to say about Roosevelt and India.

A false move. He was instantly on his guard. Do you want to get me out of this country in forty-eight hours?

After I had satisfied him I had no such intention, Donovan permitted himself to say that no doubt the President had a great amount of sympathy for India and because he kept quiet and silent about it, it must not be misunderstood that he was not well, indeed fully, informed about the state of affairs here.

Beyond this, the Consul refused to concede another word. I tried to penetrate his defences at several points but my attacks were repulsed with heavy casualties every time. So I couldn't help arriving at my own conclusion that all there was to be said had been said in Phillips' now famous letter. Phillips definitely felt something should be done.

Further, that though at that time there may have been no definite proposals—it was 1942, the crucial year, don't forget—Roosevelt, had he lived, would have gradually manoeuvred for a position which would have forced Britain's hand to concede India's freedom. But even with Roosevelt dead, the way he has paved will make the eventual result inevitable by the sheer force of gravity.

Besides, his successor Harry Truman is reported to have expressed his complete agreement with Roosevelt's policy, not only with regard to the war but in connection with the future of smaller countries.

This helped me to bring the Consul back into the picture. Will Truman turn out true to the ideas of Roosevelt?

There is no reason to suspect that he will not turn out to be as successful a President. One of our most popular Presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, Donovan pointed out, became President only on the death of Mackinley, and but for that, the world

would never have been aware of his greatness.

Truman, the dark horse of the moment—he has been darkened too much by the British Press—may materialize as the monument of American ideals. I muttered under my breath, so help him God!

As if to say God had already helped him in preparing him for his task, Donovan paid Truman the tribute of proved ability—for instance, his fine work on the committee of Government expenditure in connection with the war effort, which saved America such an amount of money.

Donovan felt the one principal difference between Roosevelt and Truman may be the fact that Roosevelt relied more on himself and his advisers whereas Truman would leave matters more to departmental heads.

That, I felt, was obviously due to his admittedly poor background knowledge. And I added that I thought it strange that the Vice-President of the United States should not be as intimately informed on all matters as the President himself.

Mr. Donovan thought this a very interesting question and explained a constitutional point. In the American Constitution it is laid down that the duty of the Vice-President is to preside over the Senate. He has no seat in the cabinet. . . .

Oh, so that accounts for President Truman's lack of background, I commented.

Cautious Donovan slipped out of a direct answer by saying that though he wasn't sure, he had an idea Roosevelt used to take Truman into cabinet meetings.

I looked wonderingly. Then he has no excuse for his ignorance.

Anticipating me quickly, the Consul explained that though he may have attended cabinet meetings, do not forget he did not attend those conferences—Casablanca, Teheran, Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta and others. . . .

You mean the late President did not acquaint him with all that passed at them?

I don't think so, was Donovan's emphatic supposition. The more intimate details of the conferences were shared only by the Big Three and their decisions were taken purely on their own responsibility.

Then is this an admission of Roosevelt's autocracy?

Far from an admission, Donovan rejoined, it is not even any indication of the kind. Roosevelt had no option but to act on his initiative in the interest of the country and his initiatives were always in the interests of democracy.

What you must not forget, Mr. Taleyarkhan, continued the Consul driving home his point, when evaluating the President, is that America is a melting pot of nations and nationalities. There are Poles, Czechs, Italians in any number and their opinions have to be taken into consideration since they are a part and parcel of the States whether the American people like it or not.

If that were so, Mr. Donovan, how is it possible that Mr. Roosevelt could be party to the virtual annexation of Poland by Russia in order to have her Western borders on the Oder? I asked remembering one of Masani's "witnesses" to prove his indictment of the Big Three.

The representative of the States replied—the question before Mr. Roosevelt was—would it be a greater gain not to quarrel with Russia or a greater loss not to stand by Poland at this stage? Similarly, I suppose, Roosevelt must have contended at the time of the framing of the Atlantic Charter—was it worth quarrelling with Britain over the omission of India from the Charter at that stage?

Roosevelt was thus serving the cause of democracy in a new way—*via* diplomacy. Perhaps he was preparing for a more suitable stage-sitting before he revealed his unimpeachable attachment to genuine democracy and not the fake forms of it which are served up at the conferences.

* * *

It only remained to ask Mr. Donovan how much of a success Roosevelt was at home.

A great deal. He made the U. S. Navy stronger; he made much-needed banking laws and regulation of stock exchange and other legislation in the teeth of opposition; he raised the morale of civil services and official departments, which had sunk, as we all know, under Hoover.

Perhaps his master-stroke, said Donovan reflecting, was his undertaking of the enormous relief works, the buildings of dams

and other hydro-electric contrivances like the Boulder Dam and the Tennessee Valley project. His enterprise met with a storm of criticism and rebuke. It was taken to be a sheer waste of money. Americans are hard to convince.

But the proof of Roosevelt's pudding was in the eating. The "eating" was the war which Roosevelt, even so far away, dimly visualized and which the American people refused to recognize even so late as 1940. It was then that these gigantic contrivances which were considered to be a sheer waste of money became just indispensable to America's war production.

Howard Donovan hung his head in momentary reflection of his leader's genius, now gone with him to the grave, the genius which the world had learned to admire, the genius which made everyone, irrespective of nationality, colour, caste or creed, say with one voice of Roosevelt in his lifetime, "*There is a man*"!

21st April 1945.

CHAPTER XLIV

A TALK WITH H. R. H. CROWN PRINCE OF ARABIA

I WAS on the tiptoe of expectation for the best part of a quarter of an hour one morning at "Gulestan," Pedder Road.

Then the moment I had been waiting for arrived. Along with some others I was taken into the gorgeous hall, so familiar to me since the house belongs to a friend of mine.

We had hardly taken our places when a magnificently built aristocratic-looking Arab stepped in.

He was His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Arabia.

Smiling, he beckoned us to resume our seats as he himself sat down, alone in his colourful grandeur. We were introduced to him by turns and he received us all standing up and gave each of us a hearty shake of the hand.

Reaching up to an appreciable height myself, I felt nevertheless "pigmified" in his presence. As he took my hand, I said after the way of etiquette, "I am honoured to meet Your Royal Highness!" He smiled graciously and turned to his most charming secretary who was presenting us. He said something to the Prince in what I presume was the Arabic language. For beyond a natural presumption, I have no other means of knowing or distinguishing that tongue.

But whatever that was, I had discovered to my horror that His Highness and I had no common language, except perhaps French which I have heard he speaks fluently, and which I know I bungle badly.

So I decided to entrust the destiny of my interview in the hands—or to be more literal, to the tongue—of the efficient interpreter, no other than that same delightful secretary.

Just before I opened my battery of questions through the common medium, a servant advanced, filled up a very tiny cup, handed it to a highly-placed servant who held a sword across his two arms as he ceremoniously proffered it to His Highness.

As yet I hadn't been able to make out the contents of the cup and I wasn't very concerned either till to my unbelievable surprise that very cup of which His Highness had drunk at a gulp—and which at best I had thought to contain some medicine for the Prince who is reported not to be in good health—came round to me, was refilled and offered to me.

I took it, and nearly dropped it. It was so hot. To avoid the actual disaster, I, taking courage in both hands, swallowed it right away, scalding my tongue and, to be quite frank, leaving a queer taste in my throat. I still don't know what the substance was!

That over, the Prince motioned his secretary to open the questionnaire. I began by showing concern about His Highness' health, how he had been progressing, and if the change were doing him any good.

Of course, judging from appearances, I wouldn't have dreamed there could be anything wrong with so superb a constitution. But evidently it is undermined.

He seems to have used up the resources of his robust health by the continual strain on it. And now, he told me, he had

turned to India for the first time in search of recuperation. It is doing him already a world of good, and but for the slight moisture and dampness the climate suits him to perfection.

His enthusiastic burst in favour of India's climatic qualities urged me to ask him about his impressions of India, the country, India's peoples, India's hospitality.

"What a wonderful land India is!" His Royal Highness began. I felt the joy of pride within me so much that I leaned forward anxiously as if to take the words directly off his lips. But alas, no! Those words of his, picturesquely meaningless as they sounded to me, were only meant for the interpreter on whose ears alone they fell with any comprehension.

His Highness told me, through the interpreter of course,—God bless him!—that he was absolutely delighted with the receptions he was treated to at the various places he had visited.

In particular, His Royal Highness, with his eyes full of grateful appreciation, mentioned the Indian Muslims who had shown him bountiful respect and sent warm messages of welcome to dodge his every step.

He looked so pleased with life that I hardly had the heart to switch off the line of conversation into "bloodier" channels. But bearing firmly in mind that a journalist must be a hard-boiled egg, I piloted my "ship" into the dangerous waters.

Instantly his expression changed. Of a sudden His Royal Highness seemed to throw fortifications round himself and his country. He looked himself grave. I began drumming my fingers on my knees as if the fate of the world hung delicately on the spur of the moment.

He said something softly but seriously to our medium. The next moment I was having His Highness' statement that the state of things was such that no man at the moment could forestall the ultimate issue.

I thought this provided an excellent opening to find out if the Prince had respect or otherwise for Hitler and Mussolini who proclaim themselves protectors of Islam. But His Highness was not to be drawn. He told me, half smiling, "What if we leave them out?"

But I was not to be outdone so easily. I tried another

ruse. . . . "If it were to come to the Near East, Your Highness, which side would Arabia pick?"

The royal reply was dramatically confident. He said with all the depth of conviction, "war will never come to us, and if, Allah forbid, it does, we shall know what to decide when the time comes." So, in short, for the moment, "mum" is word.

He looked at me with a gracious smile so much as to say, "Sorry, old boy, I can't satisfy your curiosity!"

I turned to something quite different, hoping to catch him unawares sometime later on. "Is Your Highness going to make a long stay in Bombay?"

As I waited for an answer I tried to work out a plan of "attack" as sudden as any of Hitler's best! Before I had completed it, however, the interpreter's melodious voice sang in my ears. "His Highness expects to stay here for three or four weeks according to the advice of his doctors."

Remembering suddenly that he was keen on shooting, I wondered if His Royal Highness had been tempted or was likely to be tempted by the glorious possibilities this country offers.

While he was making the reply an idea snapped in my mind. Shooting, killing, war, all the same thing! I'll get him to say something yet, I determined.

You can imagine that I felt not a little non-plussed when His Highness seemed to have anticipated my impending move in the reply he gave. "Sports are as much out of the question for me to play," he said, "as politics are to discuss!"

Just as he had finished saying this, that cup-bearer re-appeared on his second round and advanced towards His Highness. At the sight of it, I gulped, and knew it was time to leave.

26th May 1940.

2243

